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Gardening across the life course

A qualitative study of the meaning of everyday gardening and its links with well-being

Adshead, Lesley

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Gardening across the life course: A qualitative study of the meaning of everyday gardening and its links with well-being

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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June 2012

Abstract

There is a mass of common lore about the reasons people garden and the benefits they derive from gardening but little academic study into the topic. The literature has tended to take a snapshot look at gardening with little consideration of the patterning to people's experience across their lives. This study takes a life course perspective and investigates ways in which people's relationship to their garden, and the meanings they ascribe to gardening, vary at different ages and stages. It considers the links between these meanings and the well-being of the gardeners. The study is qualitative and draws on interviews with 25 gardeners in the UK, aged between 25 and 94 years. A small sample of autobiographical garden writing is also used as a data source. The study is influenced by phenomenological, biographical, narrative, and grounded theory approaches. Thematic analysis builds on narrative methods and on case by case comparison. The analysis indicates that most of the meanings associated with gardening emerged in childhood and include 'escape', 'fun and pleasure', 'aesthetic appreciation', 'care and responsibility', 'control', and 'connections'. Across the life course these meanings continue to be available to gardeners but are brought to the fore at different times and under influences which may lie within the individual or in broader social or historical forces. Life events were experienced as times for greater urgency to garden, and provide a lens through which the 'goods' of gardening can be brought into stark relief. At such times gardening is seen to support identity maintenance and offers strategies and resources for coping with major life changes. It is argued that gardening, because it evokes meanings which encompass emotional, psychological, social, spiritual and physical elements, is particularly well placed to support people at such times.

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List of Contents

Abstract		2
Acknowledgments		3
Permissions		4
Chapters		
1	Introduction: Context and Conceptual Framework	7
2	The Research Process and Methodology	37
3	Review of the literature	75
4	Recollections of Childhood Gardens: ‘Sowing the Seed’	129
5	Gardening in Adulthood: ‘Coming into Bloom’	157
6	Gardening and Life Events: ‘A Rich Harvest’	191
7	Gardening and Later Life: ‘Decline and Decay’	219
8	Conclusions: ‘Surveying the Crop’	240
References		262
Appendices		
I	Aide-Mémoire	284
II	Ethics Permission	285
III	My Gardening Story	286
IV	Sample Characteristics	297
V	Summaries of Gardeners and their Gardens	300
VI	Case Studies	313

Excerpts from Gerald's Case Study

1	Gerald's childhood recollection	147
2	Gardening after the army: building on the secure foundations	200
3	Gardening in retirement: checking and firming the foundations	231

Tables

1	Methods and Underlying Influences	74
2	Themes in Recollections of Childhood Gardens	149
3	Themes in Adult Accounts of Gardening	159
4	Themes in Relation to Gardening and Life Events	210
5	Themes in Relation to Gardening and Old Age.	233

Figures

1	Ryff's Model of Core Dimensions of Well-Being and their Theoretical Origins	32
2	Gardening Choices and Associated Key Dimensions	185
3	Model of Connections between Gardening and Well-being.	218

Photographs

Ellie's Garden	169
Leona's Garden	176
Barbara's Garden	204
Robert's Garden	213
Clive's Garden	224

Chapter 1

Introduction: Context and Conceptual Framework

This thesis explores the nature and meaning of gardening in people's everyday lives and the links between gardening and well-being. In the United Kingdom over a quarter of the population claim to be enthusiastic gardeners (Mintel, 2002) yet, until very recently, gardening had received little in the way of academic attention. This research, which takes a life course perspective, is based on in-depth interviews with twenty-five people who can be described as enthusiastic gardeners in a broad range of garden settings in the UK. This introductory chapter has two objectives: to provide the context of the study and to set out the conceptual framework. In the first part I look at the context, describing my initial motivation for the study, and discussing the background and significance of the topic, framing it in relation to existing social and environmental policy. I outline the main aims and research questions. In the second part of the chapter I set out the conceptual framework, in particular, the ways I have understood and will be using the terms 'life course perspective' and 'well-being'. The remaining part of the introduction provides a brief chapter by chapter description of the structure of the thesis, including a short overview of the literature that underpins the research and an outline of the methodology, including methods of data collection and analysis.

Context

The inspiration for the study

My interest in the meaning of gardening in people's lives was sparked by experiences encountered in my professional work as a social worker in palliative care during the course of which I would visit patients who were facing life threatening illness or would see their relatives, before or after the death, to provide emotional and practical support. Over the years I noticed how frequently aspects of gardening would become a talking point during a visit. Two cases in particular stick in my mind.

The first was when I visited the parents of a young man, who was close to death from an AIDS related illness. This was in the very early days of the epidemic and there was little in the way of effective treatment. The man had succumbed very rapidly to an illness which had ravaged his body and mind in an ugly and cruel way. He was a gay man and his elderly parents had not been aware of this before. They were confronted, then, not just with the sudden illness of their son, but also with having to make sense of new things about him, and his life, just as they were losing him; all this within the context of a disease which was then massively stigmatising and which cut them off from many conventional opportunities for support.

The elderly father spoke very little during the visit but asked me to follow him into his garden. He took me to his greenhouse where he showed me, with pride, the vegetables he was growing. They were flourishing. He insisted that I took some of his plants home and he loaded me up with tomatoes, aubergines and peppers. He wrapped them tenderly and gave me copious instructions for nurturing them. We did not talk about his son and yet I felt that there was something positive and helpful about the exchange. I did not know what it was, and as a social worker, it did not fit neatly into models of practice that I knew about.

The second case was rather different. For over a year, I visited a woman in her eighties, both before and after the death of her husband. She struggled to deal with the changes and challenges in her life, and was low in body and spirit. She limited her contact with the outside world, seldom venturing far from her flat. Her pessimism was pervasive and it was difficult to help her but every visit, without fail, she would take me onto her balcony where she would become full of life as she showed me the plants in her tubs and window boxes, all thriving. I knew it was an important part of my visit, one that we should not skip, and again I found myself pondering on exactly what this gardening, limited though it was in scale, meant to her; whether it was one of the few things sustaining her in some critical way.

In a different vein but within the same professional context I also found myself considering similar questions when I was taking part in a workshop at a conference for palliative care social workers. The group was exploring how, as individuals, we withstood the demands of the job, with its unrelenting contact with sadness, illness, death and bereavement. During the discussion someone who had been working very intensely with bereaved children said, with real conviction, that she knew it was only her love for her garden and gardening that allowed her to carry on with the work.

As I mused on what these everyday experiences of gardening amounted to for these individuals, I realised how much I had taken gardening for granted, not least in my own life. I felt I wanted to know more about its meaning to people; how it may or may not fit in with the rest of their lives, whether, and how, it could help them through times of crisis, and the nature of the links between gardening and well-being. Although my interest ultimately has a therapeutic concern, my focus here is not on gardening within a therapeutic context but on everyday experience. This dovetails with research that I have been involved with in palliative care (Beresford, Adshead and Croft 2007). That research looked into the direct experiences of service users - what was important to them, and how could professionals best offer support? When we listen properly to service users we are often challenged to look beyond our existing professional knowledge and skills in order to better understand the issues they face, the things that bring meaning to their lives, and their own ways of coping; as Dorothy Rowe says, in the forward to our book, 'Theories and systems should be made to fit people, and people shouldn't be forced to fit the theories and systems'. By exploring gardening I am hoping to better understand how people draw on the resources of 'everyday' without recourse to professional support. From this starting point I have distilled the following research aims and objectives.

Research Aim

The overall aim of the study is to explore the meaning and place of gardening in people's everyday lives and, taking a life course approach, to consider the links between gardening and well-being.

Research Objectives

- To explore how people experience their garden and the process of gardening at different times across their life course and to see whether it is possible to identify a life course profile of gardening
- To identify characteristics of gardens and gardening that individuals see as supportive elements in their lives
- To consider the specific roles gardening might play at different times in the life course

Background and significance of the topic

Britain is so often called a nation of gardeners that it is tempting to take this on face value but some argue this is a case of mistaken identity. This was the subject of an RHS Debate: *‘Private Passion or National Indifference: Is gardening still core to the British way of life?’* (Royal Horticultural Society, 2005). Although the motion, that gardening is still core to the British way of life, was carried, there are persuasive arguments on both sides; the picture is by no means straightforward. Data is gathered regularly for commercial customers by Mintel, and other market analysts, and is useful for clarifying the situation. Such data can provide insight into diverse aspects of gardening including: levels of garden ownership; how people spend their money in relation to gardening; media influences on gardening; and typologies of gardening activity and consumption. The following section which looks at these areas in turn shows that the picture of gardening within the UK is a complex one, and describes an activity that is flourishing, has cultural significance, and yet is dynamic, changeable and not fettered by tradition.

The scale and scope of gardening within the United Kingdom

In their 2004 review of gardening consumption Mintel surveyed a panel of over two thousand adults, aged fifteen and over, who are representative of the UK population, and reported that 70 per cent of adults could claim to own a conventional garden typically containing some grass and flowerbeds; a further 18 per cent have a garden that is mainly paved, whilst five per cent garden using window boxes, window sills or a balcony; four per cent have access to a communal garden and one per cent have an allotment. Some people fell into

,more than one category and only six per cent of the population surveyed did not have access to any type of garden (Mintel, 2004 p11).

Whilst these figures show that access to a garden is particularly high in the UK, suggesting that provision of a garden is seen as culturally important, they do not of course prove that there is any actual gardening going on. At the RHS debate Andrew Wilson, a garden designer and lecturer, argued that for the majority of people their garden was 'a dog run, a car park, a play space or a wilderness to which they are completely indifferent' and, for many, this is probably a very accurate assessment.

On the other hand, there is strong evidence that gardening is alive and flourishing. The DIY and Gardening market (the two are generally analysed together) has been one of the top performing retail sectors in recent, pre-recession, years. Market analysts, Verdict, reported that this sector sustained growth of over 73 per cent between 1995 and 2005 which far surpassed the 56 per cent increase in total retail expenditure over the same period (Verdict, 2006). The gardening sector has been seen as the star performer of the combined DIY and Gardening market, increasing sales by over 85 per cent to £3,648 million in 2005. Even since the UK economy has been hit by recession, the gardening sector has proved resilient. Mintel (2010) reported increasing interest in gardening, particularly in the growing of food, and highlighted this as a key area of consumer growth. In similar vein, other analysts, report that sales of garden equipment, which normally mirror fluctuations in the economy, have instead defied this trend and risen by two percent during 2011 and had risen year-on-year over the previous five years, (Keynote, 2012). They give the general rising popularity of gardening, the desire to know the provenance of food and to eat healthily, and the potential for gardeners to save money through self-sufficiency, as the reasons for this growth.

The reasons given for the buoyancy of the garden related economy have changed significantly over recent years. In the early years of the decade there was agreement amongst analysts that it reflected a robust economic situation in the UK, with sustained growth for over a decade and specifically as mirroring a booming housing market, which impacted on the gardening sector in two ways.

First, with a rising numbers of home owners (some 70 per cent of dwellings are now owner-occupied) there was increasing incentive for people to invest in their homes and gardens and secondly with the buoyant housing market and steep rises in house prices people had been able to draw on the equity in their property to finance the capital outlay of landscaping and other projects to enhance their gardens (Mintel, 2003, Keynote, 2004, Mintel, 2004, Verdict, 2006). Now, post recession, gardens are not seen as places for grand projects but are seen as ways of living more economically, through growing your own fruit and vegetables, and as having increased importance because leisure increasingly revolves around 'staying in' rather than 'going out' (Mintel, 2011).

Media influences

A third factor seen as contributing to the growth of the market is the intense media coverage of gardening over recent years (Mintel, 2001). In particular, there has been an enormous growth in the number of television programmes that concentrate on the 'makeover' - the quick transformation of gardens with fully grown plants - and with a concentration on the garden as a space for multiple leisure uses, and in particular as a space for entertaining. These programmes which might more accurately be described as lifestyle rather than gardening programmes, can attract audiences of up to 10 million, and are particularly recognised as having influenced younger home owners, who are seen as being brought into the market by new and innovative ideas that allow them to personalise their gardens. Whilst Mintel (2001) reported that 19 per cent of all gardeners said they had been significantly influenced by the gardening media, 28 per cent of 25-34 years olds said the same. The media are seen as influencing not just interest in, but also expectations of gardening,

'As consumers have learned a greater sophistication in design, they have also become more likely to want to express their own personal sense of style as a means of differentiating themselves from others. It might be an exaggeration to call gardening 'the new rock 'n' roll', but younger homeowners, now have the freedom to express themselves – their lifestyles, their artistry, even their sexuality – with their own individual gardens as never before' (Mintel, 2004 p.11)

This emphasis on gardens as spaces for demonstrating or living out a certain lifestyle is reflected in some trends in the sales figures for the gardening sector.

Whilst 'Growing Stock', the name given to actual plants, seeds and growing mediums, accounts for the largest part of the trade (worth £1,400 m in 2004), its change over the period 2000-2004 was reported as 27 per cent whilst during the same period the trade in outdoor furniture and barbeque equipment increased by 70 per cent (£750m in 2004) and enhancement features (for example water features, lighting, ornaments) rose by 50 per cent to £450m (Mintel, 2004 p16).

Gardening activity and types of gardener

So whilst it is clear that access to a space for gardening is widespread, and expenditure on plants and garden equipment seems to be growing despite the economic climate, this still tells us little about people's level of motivation towards the actual hands-on process of gardening, towards gardening as an activity. Mintel's regular reviews address this question. In 2002 they reported that gardening ranked as one of the most popular pastimes, with 44 per cent of people surveyed claiming it as a hobby, and 27 per cent claiming to 'love their gardens and work hard in them'. Sixty two percent of respondents said gardening was a secondary activity but one which they could envisage increasing with more available time, and with more knowledge. A later survey (Mintel, 2004) reported that 13 per cent of the people it surveyed identified gardening as their principal hobby. These figures all suggest that gardening, as an activity, is a significant part of life for a large percentage of the adult population.

Mintel (2004) identified various types of gardening consumers. The 'green thumbs' is their term for the group of active gardeners who focus on actual gardening in the traditional way rather than seeing the garden in terms of other leisure uses. This group is predominantly made up of older women of higher social status and Mintel estimates that they make up some 18 per cent of the adult population. In commercial terms they are seen as relatively unimportant because their knowledge of gardening techniques is high and they use this knowledge to add to their stock of plants through division, from cuttings and by growing from seeds all of which are relatively inexpensive; in addition their older age means that they have already built up a stock of equipment and their gardens are often fully developed with established planting and do not require

much additional expenditure. Their social life often involves membership of gardening groups and societies and these provide opportunities for swapping plants. All in all, they are not the big spenders amongst garden owners.

More lucrative for the trade are the ‘instagardeners’, a group that Mintel assess as making up 24 per cent of the adult population. This group tend to be younger, more likely to be in full time employment, have young families, and are more likely to be poor in terms of time. They are less knowledgeable about gardening, more likely to be learning through the gardening media, and therefore influenced by media inspired trends towards quick gardening solutions, with, for example, plants bought fully grown for instant effect, which fit in with their own lifestyle demands for low-maintenance gardens.

A third group, ‘the late bloomers’ has been identified by Mintel. These are young, often male, consumers who currently do very little gardening because of limited time and other lifestyle conflicts, but who already predict themselves becoming more interested and doing more in the future ‘when I’m older’. One of the disadvantages of gardening as a hobby is that it needs daylight to do it and for many people in full time employment this can restrict it to being a weekend only activity when it has to compete with myriad other demands and duties as well as other leisure activities.

This belief amongst the ‘late bloomers’ that they will become more active gardeners in the future is likely to be borne out. Mintel report that amongst 20-24 year olds, 46 per cent do no gardening at all, whilst this percentage has dropped to only 12 per cent of those in the 55-64 age bracket. They also report on the relatively low percentage (five per cent) of people who hire a gardener. The percentage of people hiring a gardener is, predictably highest amongst those aged 65 years and above, when it reaches 18 per cent, and this is presumably when the burden of physical work in the upkeep of the garden becomes too much, but perhaps surprisingly is highest of all amongst those in the lowest socio-economic group.

The final group to be categorized by Mintel is the largest (45 per cent of the adult population) and are labelled ‘gardening groaners’, that is those for whom

gardening is a minimal activity in their lives, done mainly out of necessity, to keep their surroundings acceptable to themselves and others.

Despite different rates of garden ownership across different social classes (81 per cent in Group A and 64 per cent in group E), gardening is not seen as a leisure activity which has a sharp class profile, and in fact lack of difference by socio-economic group is noted as an outstanding feature of the gardening market, (Mintel, 2002). They suggest that such a high rate of garden ownership and activity amongst even the lowest social status group is ‘testament to the priority given to gardens by the British as a whole’ (Mintel, 2004 p23).

To summarise, undoubtedly there is a sizeable section of the population for whom gardening is a marginal activity, one to be avoided or endured rather than enjoyed. However there is also a sizeable proportion, maybe about half of the adult population, for whom gardening is other than a chore. Over a quarter of people claim to love their gardens and work hard in them and there are sizeable numbers of people who profess to take pleasure in gardening and see themselves as wishing to know more, and do more, if only time permitted. Gardening has an age profile which shows that with increasing age, and reduced family and work related commitments, the reluctant and time short gardeners ‘the gardening groaners’ do indeed spend more time actively gardening. The market research organisations pick up on and identify the ways in which the media have been able to influence and expand the gardening market, particularly amongst the younger gardeners. Bhatti and Church (2000 p183) tell us that gardening ‘has been described as “groovy” by Vogue and “the new sex” by Tatler’ and that such ‘media hype should alert social scientists that something more significant is going on.’

The market research data provides a mass of quantitative data but it is data that is gathered for the specific purpose of informing the industry. It is useful here as a way of contextualising the current extent of gardening in the UK, both in terms of numbers who are getting involved and by identifying the heterogeneity amongst gardeners. It also gives a sense that gardening has a life course profile and it is this that I will aim to flesh out as I explore the meanings people bring to their gardening at different times in their lives. Before that, however, I want to

raise another reason why it is timely to study gardening, and its meanings for people, and that is because of widespread perceptions that gardens are under threat and the next section explores the nature of these threats, putting them within their social policy context.

Gardens and perceptions of threat: the policy context

Despite the popularity of gardens and gardening and their apparent importance for many people, some would argue that this facet of life is currently at risk. This quote, for example, is taken from a BBC news website (Rohrer, 2007) which encouraged members of the public to send in their views on this issue,

'When I was six (some 33 years ago) I met a very old woman in her 80's who lived at the end of the street. She had lived in the area her whole life, and told me how as a child she had fond memories of a time when all the houses were just fields. If I continue to live in my area for long enough, I'll be telling kids of a time long ago when I was a child, and all these flats were just houses with big gardens where children could play. As my neighbourhood is ploughed up for cheap housing I feel increasingly like I don't want to be British any longer if that's what it now means. I want to leave - but where do I, my friends, relatives and family now belong?'

This man is not only concerned about the speed at which gardens are being lost to housing development, but also feels that these are fundamental changes that, in some way, profoundly affect his cultural and personal identity, his sense of belonging. Some believe that this loss of green space is happening because public policies are weighted in favour of property developers and fail to offer adequate protection to gardens as valuable green and open spaces. They are concerned that this is happening without the true value of gardens, both to the individuals who use them and the wider community, being properly gauged (Gardenorganic, 2007).

In particular, people have been critical of the way gardens were, until June 2010, classified as 'brownfield', that is as previously developed sites, for planning purposes. The government has required 60 per cent of new housing development to be on such previously developed land, a requirement set up to preserve the 'greenfield' sites both inside and outside of urban areas (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2006). In the same policy

guidance the government also laid down targets for high density of housing within urban areas. Within the guidance there had been no clear distinction drawn between gardens and derelict industrial sites. The argument has been put that it has been easier, and more profitable, for developers to build on garden sites than to develop industrial sites that may require considerable expenditure on clearing the ground not just of buildings but also of industrial contamination such as heavy metals (Gardenorganic, 2007). This has encouraged what has come to be known as ‘garden grabbing’, the buying up and demolition of houses with large gardens to build multiple dwellings, usually blocks of flats, on the same plot. Local authority planning departments have found it extremely difficult to resist applications by developers to build on garden sites, and when they do turn down applications, appeals by the developers are likely to be allowed by the government planning inspectorate (Barclay, 2007, Gardenorganic, 2007). Increased densities of housing and the trend towards building flats rather than houses reduce the provision of individually owned or managed gardens. This is a fundamental shift with respect to the character of the housing stock of the UK and if, as one side of the RHS debate argued, gardening is core to the British way of life then this way of life is potentially being challenged at a very basic level. Even since the re-classification of gardens in June 2010, there is no automatic presumption against developing on garden sites and it is now down to each authority to decide its own priorities; as the Royal Town Planning Institute (2010) point out ‘if a community want to protect residential gardens they need to decide which is the priority, protecting greenfield sites or gardens?’

The loss of front gardens for the creation of off-street parking is a further example of policy-making failing to keep abreast of changes that are happening on the ground. This has increased dramatically over recent years as drivers, in more congested areas of the UK, seek ways of maintaining security of their cars, whilst avoiding parking restrictions, charges and fines,. Planning policies do not currently address the loss of front gardens. Research suggests that in North-East England, one of the areas most affected, 47 per cent of front gardens are now mostly paved (Royal Horticultural Society, 2006), and in London paved driveways now make up an area equivalent to twenty-two Hyde Parks or more

than five thousand football pitches according to figures collected by the London Assembly Environment Committee (2005). As they report, much of this change has occurred with little comment and without the development of policy,

‘...until now, because this phenomenon is happening gradually and locally, and there has not been any analysis of its cumulative scale and impact, this has not to date been considered seriously to be a significant London-wide issue’ (p6).

Their report highlights flooding as the major concern arising from the concreting of front gardens but also draws attention to the issue of the changing street scene, which impacts on everyone.

Gardens as part of open and green spaces within the community

Although not public spaces, gardens collectively form one of the open spaces in otherwise built up areas and it seems important to think about changes to the provision of private gardens within the wider context of changes affecting the total available green and open space such as urban parks, playing fields, and allotments. Gardens provide a high percentage of this green space and play an increasingly important role in creating biodiversity (Goddard et al., 2010). The 2011 White Paper, *The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature* makes this point,

‘The natural environment is sometimes seen as a series of disconnected places: gardens, parks, farmland, forests, coastland, wetlands, rivers and seas. We should be thinking not of isolated spots of green on a map of England but of a thriving green network linking wildlife sites with farmland, forestry and urban parks and gardens across the country.’ (DEFRA, 2011)

The next comment, taken from a report of research into people’s views about parks, illustrates the interrelatedness of green spaces within people’s everyday lives, and highlights how a perceived deficit in one area of green space – gardens - gives rise to increased emphasis on another type of green space ,

‘As a young parent with two young children living in a pokey house with next to no garden in the wealthiest, most congested region of Europe, I’d like to have some simple amenity where my children can run, play, breathe, and live.’ Respondent, South East (Cabe Space, 2004)

The White Paper is timely. Recent decades have seen unprecedented sales of allotments, as well as less developed spaces such as the corridors alongside railways. It is worth looking at these changes to green space in more detail so that the relative importance of gardens within this picture can be considered.

Playing fields

The numbers of playing fields decreased dramatically during the period 1979 to 1997, when there were no policies in place to protect them, and schools and local authorities raised finance by selling them off for housing development. It has been reported that some 10,000 playing fields were lost during this period (DEFRA, 2011). Governments since have sought to limit the damage by introducing tighter restrictions on sales but, despite this, ongoing losses have been reported. The BBC (2012) has reported, using data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, that since 2008/9 London Councils have sold off open space, mainly playing fields, equivalent to a further 67 football pitches.

Parks

Parks have perhaps fared better than playing fields in terms of protection, and overall provision has not dropped dramatically but reports indicate that prolonged reductions in both capital and revenue funding between 1980 and 2000 meant that many parks declined in quality during that period, making them less desirable and less secure places to visit and reducing their public amenity value,

'The survey supports the view that urban parks in the United Kingdom, in general, are in serious decline....A huge physical presence in our towns and cities supporting a multi-million pound business in their provision. However, despite their importance to the quality of life and vitality of our communities the last 20 years has seen dramatic cuts in revenue expenditure, which are now estimated to be in the region, cumulatively, of £1.3 billion.' (Urban Parks Forum, 2001 introduction)

In addition to funding issues they go on to argue that, ineffective management, with responsibilities for parks divided between government departments, has led to uncoordinated and fragmented strategies for improvement, with no single body championing parks against other competitors for resources at a local level.

Recent years have seen attempts to stem the decline through a raft of measures: creating a taskforce to review and report on the situation, increasing capital funding, placing less restrictions on local authority revenue expenditure, and publishing clear policy guidelines for the planning of open spaces (DTLR, 2002, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). Cabe Space, an arm of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, was established in 2003 as the national champion of parks and public spaces. They carried out a review to see if the funding and policy changes resulted in improved facilities on the ground and reported that there were still major problems (Cabe Space, 2006). In particular they found that local authorities were extremely poor at gathering information about their parks, making strategies for improvement less effective; most did not have comprehensive figures showing how much they were spending on their parks, and few of them had a clear idea of what quality they were trying to achieve.

Allotments

My research includes people who garden on allotments instead of, or as well as, in private gardens. The UK has a longstanding history of allotment gardening though this has diminished greatly from its heyday during the Second World War. As in the case of playing fields, parks, and private gardens, there are concerns about the future of allotments in the UK. The last complete national survey showed that there were some 250,000 allotment holders in England with some 13,000 more on waiting lists (Crouch, 1997). The survey also found that there was an ongoing loss of allotment plots at the rate of 9,400 per year in England, with the number waiting for a plot doubling since 1970. A smaller scale survey, just of local authority owned allotments, carried out in 2009 showed a very sharp increase in waiting lists, with a total of 76,300 people on local authority waiting lists (Transition Town West Kirby and National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, 2009). Although the authors of this report acknowledge that the survey results do have uncertainties, for example because people might put their names on more than one list, the rise in numbers is so steep it cannot be accounted for by such errors.

Figures are available for London, where a comprehensive review of allotment provision was carried out in 2006 (London Assembly Environment Committee, 2006). This review found that in London, over the previous ten years, the provision of allotments had changed in a number of ways. Firstly, the number of sites had diminished, with a net loss of thirty-two sites over a decade, which accounts for over four per cent across the city. Secondly, the number of individual plots had reduced; within the twenty councils for whom complete data was available, there were 20,786 plots, compared to 22,319 in 1996 – a reduction of 1,534. In percentage terms, the loss of plots (6.9 per cent) had been significantly greater than the loss of sites, reflecting the finding that allotment sites, instead of being closed, are often whittled down, a few plots at a time. It was this insidious loss that the committee saw as the real threat to allotment provision in London. The apparent disappearance of plots is especially worrying when seen in the context of diminishing plot sizes. In sites where there is high demand, it is increasingly common to split newly vacant plots which, some argue, is a device to get two people off the waiting list. This suggests that the amount of allotment land which has disappeared is greater than the reduction of individual plots would suggest. A government select committee reported on the situation,

‘From the evidence we received, it is apparent that the performance of local authorities with regard to allotment provision is best described as patchy. Some authorities pursue an active approach to maintaining vibrant and fully-occupied allotment sites whilst others appear at best lethargic and at worst to be instrumental in encouraging the decline of interest in allotments.’ (Paragraph 40, Select Committee on Environment Transport and Regional Affairs, 1998)

The London Assembly Report indicated waiting lists of 4300 people, a sharp increase since the previous survey. There have been many reports of increasing demand for allotments over recent years, and this is generally seen to be a reflection of growing awareness of environmental and health concerns, with media encouragement to ‘grow-your-own’ (Crouch and Ward, 1997). Increasingly the newer allotment holders are likely to be female and middle class (London Assembly Environment Committee, 2006). Irrespective of whether this development is seen as a positive one, the point that needs to be

made is that there is now a new source of demand and this could raise questions about the profile of people, or groups of people (for example, schools), that are being excluded if the overall provision of allotments is reducing.

Gardens, and by implication gardening, cannot be seen in isolation. They exist as part of a wider network of green space which, although increasingly recognised as an important resource for individual and community well-being, is consistently threatened by other priorities within economic and social policy. Neither are there any signs that these pressures are going to reduce. During the life of this study the United Nations has reported that the world population has, for the first time, become a majority urban population (UNFPA, 2007). I would perhaps be overstating the issue if I suggest that this is the immediate context for this research but undoubtedly it is vital to see the interconnections and relationships at play. If gardens and gardening are very important places and activities for something like a quarter of the UK adult population and fairly important to another quarter then the impact of the changes wrought by economic and social policies which affect access to gardens and gardening opportunities, could potentially be profound. They could be seen as impacting on an enduring, culturally important, aspect of life in the UK. We need to understand more about what gardening means to individuals so that we have a better understanding of what might be at stake and, in particular, it seems important to better understand the possible link between gardening and the health and well-being of people at different ages and stages of the life course.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework which has informed and driven this research is based not only on the literature, but also includes the perspectives and knowledge that I bring to the study which reflect my prior life experiences and learning. There are two concepts – the life course perspective and well-being – that it seems important to clarify at the outset.

Life course perspective

The life course perspective underpins much of my thinking about the world and certainly influences the way in which I approach this study; it is a perspective I

have come to through my social work practice. Social work has, at its core, a concern with both the psychological and the social and I have learned the futility of trying to understand an individual and his or her experiences without considering that person both as a unique being, with their own personality, strengths, weaknesses and defences, and as a person in context, whether that is at the level of family, peer group or age-cohort, or in terms of their position within the broader structuring forces such as class, religion, gender, and ethnicity. My work in palliative care has highlighted, for me, that the way that someone approaches and copes with their terminal illness and death generally reflects past experiences sometimes stemming from their very earliest days; understanding required a 'whole life' rather than a 'snap-shot' approach. In particular, my work with people with HIV/AIDS, a disease that arouses such a complex array of feelings in other people and which has had many negative social representations, taught me, that it was impossible to understand the way that someone experiences, and copes with, their illness without hearing at least something of their life history and their social and family context. It also enabled me to see that personal growth and development can and do take place in the very latter stages of life. My experiential learning was then formalised through my MSc degree in Life Course Development when I began to consider aspects of this life course perspective in more theoretical terms.

There is a debate as to whether the sociologically derived life course perspective should be seen as diverging from, or converging with, the life-span perspective which originates in psychology (Mayer, 2002). I do not intend to dwell on this debate but mention it here to flag up that there are similar perspectives within both sociology and psychology, with differing disciplinary emphases but each stressing the importance of recognising both the processes that lie at the individual level, and the social structural forces that contextualise and enable and constrain the individual, (Baltes, 1987). I place my own perspective very much at the point where the two perspectives are closest, where there is most integration; that is, as seeing the critical part played by socio-structural influences in shaping the life course, whilst not downplaying the importance of intra-personal characteristics including biological and personality dispositions.

Most importantly, it is the interactions between the two which are most critical for understanding the whole.

Sugarman (2001 p11-12) acknowledges that life span psychology (and by implication the life course approach) can be described as being all things to all men, as, and here she cites Kaplan (1983 p103), a “motley and monolithic movement” in which “everyone is invited to contribute his/her voice to the songfest without any restrictions on melody, lyrics and arrangements.” . To counter this criticism, Sugarman, and other authors, agree on some assumptions which are core to the perspective. These are that the potential for development continues across the entire life course; that development has biological, cognitive, socio-emotional and spiritual dimensions and understanding of the life course is therefore necessarily multidisciplinary in nature; that development is not unidirectional and developmental trajectories will vary because of the social, cultural and historical contexts within which they are embedded; that the past both constrains and enables future development; that lives are linked within and across generations, and finally that influences are reciprocal, that is, development is influenced by environment and in turn development influences environment (Sugarman, 1986, Baltes, 1987, Santrock, 1999). Put simply as Sugarman (1986 p3) says of the perspective, ‘it posits a changing organism in a changing context’.

For my research the life course perspective indicates a biographical methodology which enables me to explore the meaning of gardening across an entire life rather than taking a cross-sectional or snap-shot approach. It reminds me to pay particular attention to the passage of individuals through specific life events, those transition times in an individual’s life when there are shifts in the direction of the life course with altered biological, psychological and spiritual dimensions, and transformation of social roles. It implies the need for a constant awareness, at all stages of the research, of the need to contextualise individual experience within the broader domains of familial, social, and historical time. As the perspective assumes multi-disciplinary understanding, my study reflects this and I draw on literature from the natural and social sciences, arts and humanities, as well as autobiographical writings. I will

expand on these points in the next chapter when I describe the decisions which underpin my methodological orientation.

Well-being

The second concept which it is important to my study is ‘well-being’. Much of what is known about gardening in relation to well-being and health is derived from studies of gardening in therapeutic settings. I wanted to move away from this approach which concentrates on the role of gardening in potentially correcting things that have gone wrong, to one which explores the possible role of gardening in relation to well-being, without reference to dysfunction, in other words in exploring gardening in relation to positive functioning. This approach shares common ground with ‘positive psychology’ (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000 p41, Snyder and Lopez, 2002) which takes positive psychological functioning as its starting point in contrast to the majority of psychological enquiry which takes pathology as its starting point and attempts to work backwards to an understanding of ‘normal’ adaptive functioning. The tendency within this ‘traditional’ conceptualisation is to see positive functioning as merely the absence of pathology, a kind of neutral state, but as Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000 p7) stress,

‘...our message is to remind our field that psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best. Psychology is not just a branch of medicine concerned with illness or health; it is much larger.’

Huppert and Whittington (2003) back this view, and argue strongly that positive and negative well-being are two different states and should not be seen as one continuum. They base their argument on findings drawn from a large scale survey of people, representative of the British population, who were studied at two points, seven years apart, as part of the Health and Lifestyles survey (HALS). In addition they found, ‘that positive and negative well-being are differentially influenced by demographic, health and social factors’ (Huppert and Whittington, 2003 p119).

Under the banner of positive psychology the pace of theoretical exploration of ‘well-being’ has quickened, and there have been many attempts at conceptualisation and measurement. But before I look at these, and attempt to set out the conceptualisation that I will be using, it seems useful to differentiate between the concepts of ‘well-being’ and ‘quality-of-life’; terms sometimes used as if they are interchangeable. There seems little agreement on definitions of quality-of-life but I see it as a broad concept which encompasses all sides of life, the physical, material, social and psychological. Related to these various domains there are a raft of quality-of-life measures and indicators. Within this framework, well-being can be seen as one indicator of quality-of-life, another might be health status or standard of living (Lent, 2004).

Well-being, as a concept, is not unfamiliar but rather something we all can have a view on. Familiarity is not the same as consensus and there are some diverse views, and sometimes fierce disagreements, amongst theorists. Ryan and Deci (2001 p142) write that, ‘Although the question “How are you?” may seem straight forward enough, theorists have found the issue of well-being to be complex and controversial.’ The way I conceptualise well-being for the purposes of the study has to accommodate my everyday understanding, as well as taking account of differing theoretical accounts; it would not make sense to conceive of the term in a way that is at odds with my own observations and experiences. So before I turn to look at the ways in which theorists of well-being have addressed the issue I want to set out some observations from my own experience.

In the course of my work I have observed people who, despite extreme physical or financial burdens, have managed to portray an image of being well ‘in themselves’, of still managing to live a ‘good life’. For me, these people epitomise ‘well-being’. So, what are the factors on which I base this judgment? Such people are able to be cheerful, whilst at the same time they may not necessarily avoid sadness, and they are seemingly able to cope despite their distressing circumstances. They take set-backs in their stride, and are able to bounce back from disappointing news, or upset plans. They reach out to others and they have people or things in their life which interest or amuse them.

Importantly, when asked how they are, they are positive in their reports – they say that they feel, *all things considered*, that they are well. As a contrast to this, I know of other people who never seem well, despite apparent good health and good fortune. They seldom appear cheerful, seem beleaguered by the routine worries of life, and report continual frustrations in their relationships with others. Life disenchant and they express their feelings of discontent.

Whilst I think it is important to know how people assess their own well-being this is not said without some qualification. When people are facing very difficult times they may say they are experiencing well-being but this can sometimes be based on an element of denial about their circumstances, which whilst it might be a useful strategy for coping, particularly in the short term, nevertheless, reflects a distorted view of reality, and can be hard to sustain in the long term if their situation progressively confronts them with new evidence which undermines their stance. For me the question is raised as to whether we can claim well-being for someone if this is not based on reality but on denial.

What becomes apparent to me from these observations is that well-being is complex; seems to be achievable independently of wealth and health; and is multi-dimensional, having elements which relate to mood, resilience and coping, social interaction, and purpose. From my everyday experience I observe a degree of consistency across individual lives, which suggests that there may be some trait-like elements to well-being; some people just seem to have temperaments disposed to happiness. Despite this trend toward consistency, from my observations of people of different ages, I have a sense that the necessary conditions, for a life to be experienced as one of well-being, may change as people age. Alongside this, and in somewhat similar vein, the things that seem to underpin feelings of well-being at one historical moment appear to shift over time. Here I am thinking of things like the camaraderie of war time compared to the individualistic, aspirational concerns of the latter part of the twentieth century. Any conceptualisation would therefore need to be able to accommodate these age and history related dynamics.

Theories of well-being

So, with these observations in mind, I will now switch to looking at how well-being has been theorised within academic works. Within psychology there are two distinct approaches to understanding. The first, which has its roots in the philosophical school of hedonism, sees well-being as lying in the accumulation of experiences which provide pleasure and happiness and avoid pain. The second approach draws on Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia and asserts that well-being rests on more than simple pleasure and happiness and lies in fulfilling one's 'daimon' or true spirit. There are ways in which these two approaches overlap and ways in which they diverge but Ryan and Deci (2001 p143) suggest that the differences between them are important because they give rise to 'different questions concerning how developmental and social processes relate to well-being, and they implicitly or explicitly prescribe different approaches to the enterprise of living.'

The hedonic approach to well-being

Within psychology the hedonic view is closely associated with the work of Daniel Kahneman and Ed Diener and various colleagues, (Diener et al., 1998, Diener et al., 1999, Kahneman et al., 1999, Diener, 2000). Their psychology builds on a long tradition of thinking that asserts that pleasure, and its pursuit, is the highest good. The works of such varied thinkers as Hobbes, De Sade, and Bentham have all been rooted in this perspective (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Lent (2004 p 484) suggests that the inclusion of 'the pursuit of happiness' in the American Declaration of Independence demonstrates,

'...that it enjoys a rarefied status as a fundamental virtue (or "inalienable" right) ...at least in the United States and other Western, more individualistic nations.'

Kahneman et al (1999 p1x) in the preface to their book which lays the foundations of hedonic psychology, define the field as the study,

'...of what makes experiences and life pleasant and unpleasant. It is concerned with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow, and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.'

Within this perspective on well-being, the focus is on feelings and these can only be established by asking someone directly about how they feel – a ‘democratic approach’ which ‘grants to each individual the right to decide whether his or her life is worthwhile’ (Diener, 2000 p34). Various scales of subjective well-being (SWB) have been developed as a means of measuring people’s own evaluations of their lives - evaluations which are both affective and cognitive. It is argued that SWB has three components, which are distinct constructs although closely related to one another; they are life satisfaction, positive mood, and the absence of negative mood (Diener et al., 2002). Taken together these are often, both in layman’s terms and in the literature, referred to as happiness. Well-being within this conceptualisation is concerned with the end-state and how one achieves it is of more marginal interest.

I will not attempt to cover all the different attempts to operationalise and measure the three components of SWB. However it is worth considering some of the most widely used and validated scales as these reveal the factors which are taken to be important indicators of SWB. The PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988) measures positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA), each factor having ten items: enthusiastic, interested, determined, excited, inspired, alert, active, strong, proud and attentive (positive); scared, afraid, upset, distressed, jittery, nervous, ashamed, guilty, irritable and hostile (negative). Watson et al, assert that,

‘High PA is a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement, whereas low PA is characterized by sadness and lethargy. In contrast, Negative Affect (NA) is a general dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive mood states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness, with low NA being a state of calmness and serenity.’ (1988 p1063)

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) measures global life satisfaction, which is seen as being cognitively, rather than emotionally, driven and has items such as ‘In most ways my life is close to my ideal’ and ‘So far I have gotten the important things I want in life’. McGregor and Little (1998 p505) suggest that such, ‘happiness measures of affect and satisfaction are typically relied upon as the gold standard of well-being’, despite support for

such measures being ‘data driven and theory weak’. Diener and colleagues, argue for this empirical, rather than theory driven approach, ‘we must know some elementary facts before a large theory is created...so little was known about subjective well-being that broad theories were premature’ (Diener et al., 1998 p35).

In terms of my own observations and commonsense understanding of well-being, hedonic approaches certainly fit part of the picture; subjective appraisals of mood and life satisfaction seem hugely important aspects of being well. If people say they often experience pleasure, and say life is satisfying, then clearly that is important – and conversely, it is very difficult to assert that someone has well-being if *they* say that their life holds no pleasure for them, and is not satisfying. However, part of my everyday perception of well-being, is that positive mood is difficult to sustain in the face of some of the demands that life makes, such as major illness and bereavement. I have known people struggling with illness who would not score highly in terms of subjective well-being. In terms of the PANOS scale they would be low in positive affect and high in negative affect. The question arises as to whether these individuals can still be said to have well-being, or did it all depend on their happiness? My observations and experience suggest that the answer to this will depend on whether the individual is able to develop and recognise other meanings in life which are, even in the absence of positive mood and the presence of negative mood, still able to make life feel worthwhile. From my own observations I would say that there are people who, despite their low mood, draw satisfaction from such factors as feeling they are managing adversity, from realising that there are others who are prepared to help them through difficult times, or from seeing that they can give support to others in a similar difficult position. Whilst such things may not bring about hedonic happiness, they may still mean that a life is experienced as one of well-being. This observation suggests that whilst happiness is one of the key indicators of well-being it is not sufficient in itself. Diener himself recognises this, ‘nobody would claim that SWB is a sufficient condition for mental health, nor would psychologists choose to evaluate people’s lives solely on the basis of whether they are happy’ (Diener, 2000

p41). I turn now to examining eudaimonic approaches to see if they throw further light on the concept and these observations.

The eudaimonic approach to well-being

Eudaimonic approaches to well-being are closely identified with the work of Carol Ryff, and theorists working from this perspective have been critical of approaches which identify subjective happiness as the sole criterion of well-being. They argue that it is possible to be subjectively happy but not living what would normally be described as a 'good life'. The definition of the good life is, in their view, not a subjective decision but rests on an objective account deriving from philosophical and ethical accounts 'concerned with the nature of human thriving and flourishing' (Ryff and Singer, 1998). The most significant departure between this approach and the hedonic approach is that, here, the belief is that there is a range of objectively valid human needs which need to be met if someone is to achieve well-being. Theories deriving from a eudaimonic perspective have at their core a belief that happiness and pleasure, per se, are no guarantors of well-being. People can be happy in the moment but these eudaimonic theorists look for a definition of well-being that is more long term, as Ryff and Singer (1998 p3) put it,

'...we posit that a judicious formulation of positive human health is grounded in more than momentary pleasures. The whole life that is well lived is a many splendid thing, with some splendours having greater import for soundness of mind and body than others.'

Ryff and colleagues agree that happiness may derive from a life well-lived but in itself, happiness is not 'the main message'. Ryff (1995 p99) draws on three areas of psychological literature in order to distil an account of the core features of well-being, putting the emphasis not on feelings but on functional aspects of well-being. First, she cites the work of developmental psychologists, especially life span psychologists, such as Erikson, Bühler and Neugarten who have conceived well-being in terms of 'progressions of continued growth across the life course.' Second, she draws on the work of clinical psychologists such as Maslow, Rogers, Allport and Jung, each of whom made their contribution to the definition of what constitutes well-being and a 'fully functioning person'. Finally, she draws on mental health literature and in particular the work of

Jahoda on the positive criteria for mental health, and Birren, for his work on positive functioning in later life. Ryff suggests that because of the diversity of views held by these writers, and the lengthy accounts they give, the impact of their work on empirical research into well-being, has been less than might have been expected and warranted. Ryff carries out a detailed review of their theories seeking the points of convergence between their varied accounts and from this position defines the core features of well-being, illustrating them in the model shown below.

Ryff sees the six dimensions at the heart of the model - autonomy, self acceptance, positive relations, personal growth, purpose in life, and environmental mastery – as constituting psychological well-being, even in the absence of happiness, although she acknowledges that happiness is often a by-product of personal well-being. Her approach sees well-being as ‘being grounded in more than momentary pleasures’; rather, it is concerned with a ‘whole life’ and Ryff maintains that this conceptualisation fits with philosophical efforts to define the ‘good life’.

Figure 1: Core dimensions of well-being and their theoretical origins
(Ryff, 1995 p100)

Figure removed for copyright reasons

As Waterman (Waterman, 1993 p 678) argues this viewpoint has an ethical dimension; the daimon, translated as ‘true self’ is regarded as synonymous with

one's true potential, 'an ideal in the sense of being an excellence, a perfection, toward which one strives and, hence, it can give direction and meaning with one's life'. Ryff and Singer (2006) argue that the hedonistic psychologists who sometimes also draw on Aristotle in support of their claims have mistranslated the term *eudaimonia*, and miss important distinctions made by Aristotle between the satisfaction of right and wrong desires. This view that there is an objective basis to 'the good life' is further complicated by Soitu (2005 p255) who argues that 'ideas of wellbeing capture and reproduce important social norms'. She suggests that current notions of wellbeing are heavily influenced by a discourse that emphasises individual responsibility and agency, and where individuals are seen as consumers rather than citizens, 'wellbeing emerges as a normative obligation chosen and sought after by individual agents.' My working assumption is that it is important to take both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives, and the tensions between them, seriously and together they provide a broad framework, compatible with my own observations and experience, for understanding the concept of well-being.

This chapter so far has set the scene. It has set out my reasons for embarking on the study and explored the nature and scope of gardening in the UK, largely drawing on statistics gathered through market research to inform the horticultural industry. It has considered reasons why it is now timely to look at everyday gardening in light of perceptions and fears that such activity is threatened by changes to the provision of gardens, in particular, and green space more generally. It has set out the aims and objectives of the study in broad terms and has explored two of the key concepts - 'life course perspective' and 'well-being' - which underpin the research.

Chapter 2 describes the research process and methodology, indicating ontological and epistemological positions. As already stated, this is a qualitative interpretive study, which takes a life course perspective, and involves analysis of biographical data taken from interviews with a sample of twenty-five keen gardeners, supported by further data taken from a small sample of autobiographical writing. Narrative and case by case comparative approaches are used in the analysis. The methodology chapter takes a 'natural history'

approach to describing the research process, so that the decision-making with its twists and turns, its false starts and blind alleys are laid bare.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature. This is extremely broad, sometimes only tangentially relevant, and lacking a discrete body of academic work that critically discusses the meaning of gardening in people's everyday lives. Since the literature is so broad and disparate I decided, for the sake of coherence, to frame my discussion of it in relation to the key opportunities that gardening affords and utilise this framework to systematically explore empirical and theoretical writing which considers the links between each of these opportunities and health and well-being. The opportunities are: for contact with nature; for physical activity; for social interaction; for leisure and recreation; and for personal expression and meaning making. Since there is such a broad array of literature from many different disciplinary sources, my review restricts itself to mapping out the landscape rather than to providing an in-depth critique of the various works. Whilst the literature discussed under each of the domains is quite disparate it is unified by some underlying theoretical concepts, such as Attention Restoration Theory and the Biophilia Hypothesis and because these are potentially unifying concepts I have described them in some detail. The chapter also addresses the question of where my own work sits in relation to the broader literature.

Chapters 4 to 7 report on the analysis, presenting the themes as far as possible in people's own words, followed by a discussion of key points. The analysis showed that gardening was patterned across lives, with peaks and troughs. The chapters loosely follow the life course peaks. Chapter 4 starts with recollections of childhood gardens and also briefly discusses adolescent attitudes to gardening. The adolescent years prompt a barren period for gardening, with a fairly universal dip in both interest and activity. However, in contrast, the experiences of gardens and gardening encountered in childhood appear to play a formative role for adult appreciation and the importance of adult role models is highlighted. Most of the themes and meanings discussed in relation to adult gardeners are shown, in embryonic form in this chapter and some important elements of the garden, such as its private versus social dimensions, are

revealed. In the discussion I draw on theoretical work by Sebba (1991) which suggests how childhood experiences of the natural world may be etched into the memory in such a way that they later invoke a specific emotional response in adults which heightens the attraction of gardening.

Chapter 5 concentrates on gardening in adulthood and in particular focuses on the reasons for the return to gardening after the barren period of adolescence and young adulthood. I discuss the 'self-consciousness' of these new gardeners. Issues of identity are considered and the ways in which gardening might support different identity processes explored. I discuss how the multiplicity of choices inherent in gardening provides a rich context for developing different elements of identity.

Chapter 6 focuses on life events as these were times when gardening took on particular intensity for people, and when arguably the meaning of gardening is brought into the sharpest relief. Life events thus provide a particular lens through which supportive processes can be explored, described and understood. This chapter discusses people's experiences in relation to literature which draws on research into coping, transitions, loss and bereavement. The chapter demonstrates how gardening is actively utilised, as a resource and a strategy for coping, as a factor that can both mediate and moderate stress. As gardening can impact on physical, psychological, social and spiritual domains of life it is a resource with particular potency.

Chapter 7 considers gardening in relation to the later adult years and in particular focuses on whether there are distinctive meanings of gardening for older people. The place of 'self' in the accounts of older people is discussed and I explore whether gardening still has a role to play in supporting identity processes for people approaching the end of their lives. I use the theme of 'control' to discuss the way certain meanings attached to gardening may take on a different complexion in old age. Spiritual matters are brought more overtly into the accounts of older people and I discuss this in relation to the notion of 'unselfing'.

Woven through the four chapters are excerpts from a case study of one of the older gardeners, Gerald. This is provided to give a fuller picture of an individual's gardening story, showing how gardening is experienced within a specific family, generational and historical context. It shows something of the continuities and discontinuities across a life, demonstrating how childhood experiences of gardens and gardening continue to reverberate in later years; having an ongoing impact on the way gardening is performed and on the meanings it carries for an individual. Other case studies are provided in the Appendices.

The four chapters of analysis show how variably individuals draw on gardening at different times of their lives and show that gardens and gardening can hold a wealth of meanings. Chapter 8, the concluding chapter attempts to draw the strands together and considers what gardening means, not only for the individual, but more broadly for the societies in which those individuals live. In this chapter I also revisit the aims and objectives of the study, and summarise the key messages from each of the chapters of analysis and I consider the usefulness of bringing the life course perspective to the topic. In the final part of the chapter I consider what might be termed the 'common ground' looking at the core elements of gardening - what it is and what it isn't – and then revisit the question of well-being and integrate my analysis with the conceptions of well-being described earlier in this chapter. I return to the subject of social policy and consider the implications if access to gardens and gardening is to become more limited. I discuss strengths and limitations of the study, and identify fruitful areas for further study. To end chapter 8 and the thesis, I return to the beginning, and reflect again on the people who inspired me to ask about the meaning of gardening in people's everyday lives and its links with their well-being.

Chapter 2

The Research Process and Methodology

This chapter sets out the way I set about designing and implementing the research. I will discuss the specific methods I used for gathering and analysing the data, the theoretical and methodological perspectives that underpin my choice of methods, and the epistemology that is intrinsic to those theoretical and methodological positions. I will take what Silverman calls a ‘natural history’ approach, that is, I will tell the story of how my research unfolded naturally with its various twists and turns.

I am concerned to write an accurate account which doesn’t skirt around the untidiness of the process but rather puts on display its inherent *disorder*, with its regular modifications, trial-and-error and switches of direction. This seems to me to be important. Descriptions of qualitative research which tidy up the reality for the sake of clarity or brevity have the potential to mislead. I think a truthful account is important and is more than just a matter of being honest. One of the ways in which the validity of a piece of qualitative work can be assessed is through a clear description of the design process. As Maxwell (2005 p3) says, ‘because a design always exists, it is important to make it explicit, to get it out in the open where its strengths, limitations, and consequences can be clearly understood.’ In tidying-up an account it is very easy to fall back on descriptions of design that suggest linearity – a plan put into action unfolding progressively and neatly - from beginning, to middle, to end. This can be seductive because it suggests a methodical, step-like, technically rational approach to qualitative research, all characteristics which seem to confer rigour but as Dupuis observes, do not, for her at least, reflect the reality,

‘On the contrary, I have found the qualitative research process to be a dialectical process filled with chaos and order, predictability and surprise, confusion and great clarity, many commonalities and as many inconsistencies.’ (Dupuis, 1999 p55)

My belief is that despite writing an *untidy* account, by showing the ‘workings out’ which underpin my design decisions, I will nevertheless be able to

demonstrate that my design does rest on a clear structure. This structure is based on an interactive rather than a linear relationship between its various elements as conceptualised by Maxwell (2005 p5). He describes four linked elements - goals, conceptual framework, methods, and validity - all in interaction with the fifth element, the research questions.

I found this model a useful guide to keeping my design on track. The untidiness, in part, arises from the zigzagging backwards and forwards between these elements to ensure that they take proper account of each other. This approach to design derives rigour from the attention given to ensuring that the elements of the design are integrated and support each other, rather than from the way in which the design is planned in advance and followed through in a methodical and technically precise way.

Getting started

As I have described in the introductory chapter, I came to this research because of experiences encountered in my professional life where gardening seemed to be playing an important, but hazy, role in people's lives. My feeling was that these people were drawing on gardening in a way that was sustaining them when they were otherwise grappling with major life events. I wanted to have a better understanding of what gardening meant to these individuals and importantly how it related to other aspects of their lives.

Having decided on my broad topic, 'the meaning of gardening in everyday life and links with well being', I needed to find out what had already been written. As a first step I searched data bases within medical and environmental sciences, social science, geography and the humanities using the key words, gardens/gardening and horticulture, in a variety of combinations with the keywords: health, well-being, coping, meaning/s, therapy/therapeutic, life course, and life events. These searches turned up wide ranging literature from many different disciplinary areas, but notably health care, health psychology, environmental psychology, nursing and sociology. I found there was a sizeable body of literature which related to gardening and horticulture used within a therapeutic context and from this I built a picture of some of the links between

gardening and health and well-being which had been identified and which might also be important in a domestic setting. I noted that there was surprisingly little academic writing about the meaning and place of gardening in everyday life and this confirmed it as an area in need of further research.

I knew, however, that there was much written from a non-academic stance and made an early visit to the Royal Horticultural Society library. There I found shelves of literature that they refer to as general garden writing. This is made up mainly of works where people have written about their own garden and their experience of developing it. I worked systematically through these general works looking at the chapter headings and dipping in and out of the texts, and found the majority of authors wrote about their likes and dislikes in relation to specific plants or styles of planting, or about the way they had tamed elements of the land they gardened, enabling them to grow plants in unlikely places, or how the garden bloomed in relation to different seasons and climates. In short, the main focus was on the gardens rather than on the gardener. There may be passing references to deep feelings of satisfaction, or failure, in terms of what had, or had not, flourished but there was little sense of what this success or failure had meant to the writer within the broader context of their life as a whole. There were a few exceptions to this where writings were more autobiographical, the tone more reflective and the gardening theme was interwoven with broader aspects of the individual's life. In these works it seemed that gardening was often described as a refuge at times of mental or physical distress and this of course chimed strongly with my own observations and I made a note of these authors to return to later.

There was also a mass of garden related poetry which encompassed many themes – themes as disparate as awareness of the seasons, the nature of beauty, the symbolism of gardens at times of war, and childhood memories of gardens – and again I noted themes which seemed to dominate. One issue seemed to recur across all eras, and in many guises, and that was dealing with garden predators and pests. Many of these particular poems took on a light hearted and humorous slant and it would have been easy to dismiss them as mere doggerel but I felt their quantity alone suggested this was an issue that gardeners grappled

with and I sensed I would want to come back to this topic and think about it in much more depth.

I mention this here because it illustrates how some quite minor issue can seem relevant and yet difficult to make any sense of at the time. I made memos of issues like these as I went along. My memos are sometimes saved on the computer, and are sometimes just jottings on the back of an envelope if the right note book is not to hand. Periodically I round up all the disparate bits of paper and save them in box files to be consulted later. I describe this process here, not for the sake or revealing my messy working habits, but because it illustrates the way thinking – about design, about concepts, about analysis – can progress in qualitative research. Interpretations or questions emerge as I play around with the data in my head when I am on the train to work or in bed at night. This way of working is totally different to much quantitative data analysis where such ‘play’ is not possible given the large data sets involved and the technicality of the analytic processes associated with quantitative research.

At the same time as I was considering the gardening literature I was also becoming more sensitised to the broader ways in which gardens and gardening were represented outside of the gardening literature itself. For example in 2004/5 The British Library ran an exhibition with the theme ‘The Writer in the Garden’ which used the work of poets, novelists, essayists, philosophers, designers and scientists to explore the interrelationship between writers, writing and gardens, focussing on such themes as ‘where is paradise?’ , ‘private places, public spaces’ and ‘enchanted gardens’ .

The literature and such exhibitions had taken me in so many varied directions - had suggested so many themes and issues - that I was quickly becoming overwhelmed. It was difficult to see where to go next. I made the decision, really very early on, that I should embark on some data collection as a way of getting to grips with the way gardeners themselves saw the place of gardening in their lives. I felt this would lead to a grounding of the research in real experience and hoped that from that starting point I could increasingly narrow my reading and focus my thinking on those themes which seemed most relevant to my particular research interests.

Qualitative research paradigm and life course perspective

I had always assumed that my study would take a qualitative approach as the characteristics and strengths of qualitative research seemed clearly suited to my specific research goals. I was concerned not with quantifying but with identifying and exploring the qualities of experience which would be described in words; I was concerned with understanding gardening as an activity of everyday life and therefore would be studying it in a naturalistic setting – in context; I was seeking to explore the complexity of people's experience in detail rather than focussing on a few discrete variables; all of these features are seen as hallmarks of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, Cresswell, 1998, Flick, 2002)

I was interested in understanding gardening from the perspective of individual gardeners - from the meanings people attach to gardens and gardening as action, idea and place (Francis and Hester, 1990). I wanted to know how they experienced, understood and interpreted these facets of their everyday life and as Bryman (1988 p8) writes, 'The way in which people being studied understand and interpret their social reality is one of the central motifs of qualitative research'. I was interested not just in the meanings themselves, but in exploring how people developed and sustained the meanings over time. Qualitative research promotes this emphasis on capturing process, as Woods sums it up,

'Qualitative researchers are interested in how understandings are formed, how meanings are negotiated, how roles are developed....these are processual matters, not products. Social life is ongoing, developing, fluctuating, becoming. It never arrives or ends....' (Woods, 2006 p4)

Qualitative inquiry, whilst having these features in common, is not a unified field in other respects, indeed Schwandt refers to,

'The unruly, largely unorganized (and often conflicting) assumptions, features, characteristics, approaches, perspectives, philosophies, methods and so on that comprise the subject matter of qualitative research methodology' (Schwandt, 1997 pxiv)

As qualitative research is underpinned by different assumptions and perspectives it was important for me to identify what these were in respect to this study. I was aware from the outset that I would bring a particular approach - the life course perspective – to the research. Bengtson and Allen (1993 p471) summarise the perspective as emphasizing ‘the importance of time, context, process, and meaning on human development and family life’. Jamieson and Victor (1997 p181) writing from a gerontological viewpoint suggest that the perspective is not a theoretical framework as such and is ‘best viewed as a map of orientation suggesting important points to look out for on the road to an understanding of ageing’. Hareven and Adams, key advocates of the approach, write,

‘The life course approach provides a way of examining individual as well as collective development under changing historical conditions. It shifts the focus ...away from stages and ages to transitions and the timing of life events...Rather than viewing any stage of life, such as childhood, youth and old age, or any age group in isolation, it is concerned with an understanding of the place of that state in an entire life continuum.’ (Hareven and Adams, 1982 pxiii)

The perspective provides me with four points of orientation, which helped define the methods I used for gathering and analysing data. First, is the central importance it gives to temporality - individual, generational, and historical time - as a context for individual behaviour and development. The centrality of age cohort, as an important concept within this, is flagged up (Arber and Evandrou, 1993, Pilcher, 1995), and the interactions between the different dimensions of time are seen as crucial influences (Sugarman, 1986, Baltes, 1987, Bengtson and Allen, 1993, Santrock, 1999, Sugarman, 2001).

Second, is its emphasis on context; it sees individual lives as nested within layers of social and historical context all exerting an influence; it bridges micro and macro levels of theory (Elder, 1974, Bronfenbrenner, 1979), though it posits a dialectical relationship between the individual and the social, with influence going in both directions (Hunt, 2005).

The third point of orientation is the emphasis the life course perspective puts on development as a dynamic process, and especially the links and interrelationships between one part of life and another; the focus is on both continuity, and change, across the life course. The approach attempts to disentangle individual developmental changes from changes due to life stage, or to cohort and period effects (Bengtson et al., 1985).

Fourth, is its bringing together of theories derived from different disciplinary areas. Individual development is seen as having biological, cognitive, historical, social, emotional and spiritual dimensions and understanding of the life course is therefore necessarily multidisciplinary in nature. Hunt (2005) who draws on the work of Giele and Elder (1998), describes the life course approach as emerging

'...out of the confluence of several major theoretical streams of research concerned with integrating schools emphasizing social structure on the one hand and individual agency on the other (Hunt, 2005 p22)'.

My aim then is to explore people's gardening experiences within the broader context of their life course with its ongoing interplay of family, work, and social time, and to take account of the broader cultural and historical contexts within which individual lives are embedded. Adopting a life course perspective does not require any specific approach to data collection or analysis; there are life course studies which take a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis and others which are wholly qualitative in design.

Research Methods

I anticipated the need for research methods which would enable me to access biographical data that would allow exploration of the experience of gardening in relation to the individual's personal development and life history. Life course data is, arguably, best collected through longitudinal studies which can repeatedly return to the same individual at different stages over their life and collect current information about them or contemporaneous accounts of their experiences. For practical reasons of time and resources, that option was clearly not open to me so my data had to be gathered through retrospective biographical

methods. Biographical methods frequently draw on narrative methods of interviewing; methods which encourage the telling of the life history in terms of a story or stories with minimal interruption and direction from the interviewer.

Biographical and narrative approaches have a number of methodological strengths and weaknesses associated with them. They are particularly valuable for exploring the subjective reality of an individual, As Faraday and Plummer observe,

'In line with the broad tradition of verstehen sociology, the life history technique documents the inner experiences of individuals, how they interpret, understand and define the world around them...the focus of life history is paramountly concerned with the subjective meanings of individuals. Most notably it comes to lay bare the 'world taken-for-granted' of people – their assumptions and what it is they find problematic about life and their lives in particular' (Faraday and Plummer, 1979 p776)

They are focussed on gathering a processual account of experience rather than a static account and can in particular make it easier to isolate and examine critical turning points in life when there maybe important shifts in values, roles, responsibilities, and identities. Understanding of a current experience can be enhanced by knowledge of the antecedents that led up to it. Although, in the extract above, Plummer highlights the value of life-history accounts for their ability to capture subjective meanings and stresses the inner life - the meaning making of the individual - others (Chamberlayne et al., 2000, Roberts, 2002) have stressed the value of biographical research for its ability to clarify the interplay between the individual and their social context. Chamberlayne et al note that,

'...biographies, which are rooted in an analysis of both social history and the wellsprings of individual personalities , reach forwards and backwards in time, documenting processes and experiences of social change' (Chamberlayne et al., 2000 p1-2)

There are a number of weaknesses associated with retrospective biographical and narrative accounts. These approaches, with minimal direction from the interviewer, allow for discursive accounts of experiences which may well focus

on different, sometimes very idiosyncratic, aspects of the experience and this, together with different styles of story telling, can make comparisons of texts difficult. Memory is an unreliable reservoir for data; people have faulty recall, and, in the absence of accurate recollection, may re-write their past and sometimes will do this in such a way that they re-cast themselves in a more favourable light. I pick up on this point below when considering epistemological issues. Although my approach was biographical I was not concerned with gathering whole life histories but on the much more limited task of gathering a history of their gardening experiences within their total biography.

As I have indicated, I was not coming to the research without ideas and theories, but I was not setting out to test any specific hypothesis, theory or model. I saw myself as working inductively - at least as a first step - that is, I saw myself as gathering data in which I would seek to identify patterns and themes, rather than gathering the data in order to assess the strength of a pre-existing theory. Induction is identified as the dominant approach in qualitative research (Cresswell, 1998) and Bengtson and Allen (1993) also identify it as the approach most commonly associated with the life course perspective. Part of this approach is being open to the unexpected and I wanted my research to be flexible enough so that I could adapt it and shape it as I went along, and again flexibility is a characteristic of qualitative designs (Miles and Huberman, 1994, Cresswell, 1998, Maxwell, 2005).

Data gathering

I had decided on using interviews as the main method of data collection. Although this may seem the most obvious way of gathering data about the meaning of lived experience it was not a choice made without some forethought. I had considered using written autobiographical data held at the Mass Observation Unit. This archive, based at the University of Sussex, has, since 1937, collected written data on aspects of everyday life from its panel of 'observers'; its stated aim was to collect 'an anthropology of ourselves' (Economic and Social Data Service). It regularly sends out directives seeking information on wide ranging aspects of life. I had used this resource before for my MSc dissertation. I knew the data they collected was qualitative,

extensive, rich and likely to be very relevant. I knew they had specifically sought data on people's thoughts and feelings about gardening. This data would have been gathered from people who disliked gardening as well as from enthusiastic gardeners. This last point focused me. I realised that it was the keen gardeners that I was interested in. I had never conceived gardening as something that motivated everyone. My initial interest was sparked by observing keen gardeners and wondering about the role of gardening in their lives. I decided that this focus should remain and that my sample would be made up of people who were identified, either by themselves or others, as keen gardeners.

I was not yet quite ready to give up the idea of using the mass observation archive. I contacted them and discovered that they were in the process of collating data gathered from a second gardening directive but this was not going to be available for several months. I did not wish to delay data gathering. Another consideration was that the Mass Observation data had been used, alongside survey data, by other authors in their research on gardening (Bhatti and Church, 2000, Bhatti and Church, 2001). I felt it was better to try to complement their work rather than use the same data set.

Moreover there were other advantages to carrying out face-to-face interviews. They would allow me flexibility in the gathering of data, for example, I could specifically adopt the biographical approach which would enable me to see how gardening related to the life course and factors such as biological age, birth cohort, life stage, and the occurrence of normative and non-normative life events; I wanted to see how gardening meshed with the activities associated with family and working life. Interviews are, by definition, interactive and I could probe the participants' stories and check out my understanding as I went along. Interviews could be developmental, that is, in later phases of interviewing I could pick up on themes identified in the earlier phases and target the questioning more closely around these themes to seek clarification and amplification. None of this interaction and development of interviews would have been possible with the mass observation data.

The Pilot Interviews

I decided I would carry out three pilot interviews and then review each step I had taken. At that early stage I did not really need to give a lot of thought about finding people to interview as people began suggesting themselves, their colleagues, family and friends as soon as they heard what I was proposing to study. It seemed there was no shortage of keen gardeners around and almost all seemed very willing to talk to me. This was a surprise as I had worked on other research studies and had often found people were quite reluctant about getting involved and needed to ask lots of questions before committing themselves. Now, I had to turn people away. I became certain that the study felt relevant and interesting to people and was not something that was already over researched. I settled on three people: a colleague, a fellow student and the mother of another colleague. None of these people were friends, or even close acquaintances, and all professed or were said to be keen gardeners.

I drafted an aide-memoire for the interviews to remind me of areas I wanted to consider (Appendix I). I did not want to follow this slavishly as that seemed to defeat the whole object of the exercise which was to encourage the telling of their life history of gardening. I felt it may be helpful for the interviewees to talk chronologically about the gardens in their life, telling me anything that seemed important to them and it was with this suggestion that I began each interview, though I referred back to the aide-memoire with additional questions at regular points in the interview.

Interviews took between one and two hours and my intention was to visit each garden or allotment. In fact, for practical reasons, this was only possible in the case of one of the pilot interviews. I tape recorded each interview with a digital recorder and I fully transcribed the pilot interviews myself though later I used a professional transcriber. I made additional field notes soon after each interview and again after transcription; these notes recorded impressions about the person and their experiences, descriptions of the garden, thoughts about themes, and questions about methods. These remained my ways of working throughout the period of data gathering.

Reviewing the pilot interviews

The pilot interviews proved enormously helpful. It was at this point that some questions emerged in supervision about my style of interviewing. In one of the pilot interviews I had, perhaps without really appreciating it, strayed into a style of therapeutic interviewing which was familiar and comfortable to me as a palliative care social worker, but perhaps less in keeping with the traditions of interviewing in qualitative research. In particular, in seeking to understand the person, I had offered potential interpretations and explanations of their experiences within the interview itself. I think at the time I saw this as nothing other than giving the person the chance to think about and rebut my interpretations there and then, but when the style was questioned, and I really thought about it, I quickly understood that there was a lack of clarity about the goals of my interview, a lack of clarity that possibly extended to the research aims themselves. Several questions emerged; was I seeking to understand the person, or was I seeking to understand the essence of gardening through their experience? Or was I simply trying to understand their experience for its own sake? Where should I focus my attention so that I could achieve my research goals? These were questions that I found difficult to answer, and which I have gone back to several times throughout the study. This was a useful juncture in the research as it helped sharpen the way I thought about some key ethical, epistemological and analytical issues, which I will consider in turn

Ethical issues

First I realised that I needed to be very clear about the boundaries that ethical considerations placed on my approach to interviewing. I was not there to understand the person in any therapeutic sense. I was not there to support them in any way, and my hunches about why they do, or say things, are not necessarily helpful to them. I was only sanctioned to ask questions that, in some way, pertained to gardening and this had been plain enough to me in the first interview when the participant had discussed her increased keenness in gardening when her marriage was very unhappy. I sensed then, that whilst she was offering me this observation, she did not really wish me to probe in depth about her life at that time. I realised that she was a very private person and felt that to probe deeply or offer interpretations was going beyond the permissions

implicit within the ethics approval I had for my research, and certainly beyond a level that I felt to be fair given what she had agreed to do, which was talk about gardening. Any interpretations of her behaviour I kept out of the interview itself, simply accepting and acknowledging what she told me and not attempting to get beyond her defences.

However these ethical considerations had seemed less important with one of the other pilot interviews, the one which had given rise to the discussions with my supervisor. In that interview the person had seemed to me to be far less private, was personally very reflective and had seemed very comfortable with the probing style of interview. During the interview it had seemed useful to offer interpretations to the person; it felt as though it would help progress my understanding of him as a person. Despite this, and in light of the discussions, I felt I needed to re-think my approach to interviewing and be clearer as to its purpose. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) draw a helpful distinction between clinical practitioners who interpret *into* the encounter as part of the data production process, and researchers who interpret *outside* of it, as part of the data analysis process. I felt that despite the second person's seeming comfort with my therapeutic style I needed to remain consistent in my ethical approach to the interviews and I saw that this consistency had perhaps been compromised to a degree in this interview with its '*into the encounter*' interpretations. I think gentle probing around issues including sensitive issues is expected as part of a research interview but offering interpretations into the interview turns the whole encounter into a different type of relationship and one that it is not necessarily expected as part of the research commitment.

The pilot interviews made me realise that the subject of gardening was quite capable of raising complex and sometimes very painful memories for people. Sometimes I think the participants were prepared for this but at other times I think it was completely unexpected and in some of those cases I felt it would have been unethical to probe too deeply when additional material was not spontaneously forthcoming.

Formal ethical approval

Formal ethical approval for the study was obtained through Kings College Research Ethics Panel (Appendix II)

Epistemological issues

In trying to unravel the question of what it was that I was seeking to understand - the person, their experience of gardening, the nature of gardening itself, or some combination - I realised that I was encountering epistemological issues. The ultimate goal of my research is to understand more about the meaning of gardening in people's lives and how it might link to their well-being. What does gardening mean *to* them but especially *for* them? Could I find this out by simply asking people? I did not feel this was really possible. When I looked at the field notes I had made after each pilot interview it was apparent that I was prepared to venture beyond the participant's own account. For example, with reference to the first interview, in my field notes I had conjectured that gardening might substitute in a number of ways for paid employment in the life of the gardener who was supported by her husband and did not work outside the home. This was not something she had explicitly put into words. It was my interpretation. So I was not going to be simply a faithful reporter of the participants' meanings.

As I said earlier, with regard to one of the pilot interviews, I struggled with my role and was overly interpretative within the interview itself. In later interviews I was more conscious of this possibility and avoided offering interpretations. However I am not saying that I distanced myself and saw myself as an impartial observer. I do not think this is possible or even desirable in research of this type. Clearly I have ideas which I bring into the research. I am a gardener myself and have obviously thought about the meanings I attach to my own garden and to gardening as an activity but I do not think I came into the research with a specific hypothesis to test or to 'prove'. I came to the study with real curiosity to hear about the experiences of other people. Kvale draws the distinction between the interviewer as miner and the interviewer as traveller. As miner,

'the interviewer digs nuggets of data or meanings out of a subject's pure experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions...the knowledge nuggets remain constant through the transformations of appearances on the conveyor belt from the oral stage to the written storage. By analysis, the objective facts and the essential meanings are drawn out by various techniques and molded into their definitive form' (Kvale, 1996 p3)

This was not how I saw myself or the data in my study. I saw myself as more closely allied to Kvale's description of interviewer as traveller,

'the interviewer...asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as "wandering together with"' (Kvale, 1996 p4)

Whilst I identify with this approach it raises new issues. Hollway and Jefferson argue that many ethnographic researchers make an assumption that their participants are able to tell 'it like it is' and,

'...that participants know who they are and what makes them tick – what we might call the 'transparent self-problem' – and are willing and able to 'tell' this to a stranger interviewer – what we might call the 'transparent account problem' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000 p 2-3)

Like them, I think this view has a naivety about it. As they go on to say,

'Treating people's own accounts as unproblematic flies in the face of what is known about people's less clear-cut, more confused and contradictory relationship to knowing and telling about themselves. In everyday informal dealings ...we question, disagree, bring in counter-examples, interpret, notice hidden agendas.' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000 p3)

In everyday life we accept that people are not necessarily transparent in their communications, and are often unable to articulate the meanings of everyday experiences, yet in qualitative research there is frequently an emphasis placed on allowing participants to 'speak for themselves', as though they are then able to serve up their reality as if it is fixed, knowable and desirable to share. I do not see things in that way. I see accounts as partial and incomplete; for many reasons only some things will be revealed - people forget, deliberately conceal

or have psychological defences built up to protect them from troublesome thoughts. Sometimes they simply cannot find the words to describe their feelings, beliefs and actions, or perhaps they have not worked out for themselves what part particular experiences play in their lives, having been too involved in the 'doing' to think about the meanings of their actions.

Many of the people I interviewed said they had never before consciously paused to reflect on what gardening meant to them; it was because I was asking them to tell their story that they were considering this for the first time. It was very clear that they were building or constructing their stories from scratch as it were, in the course of the interview and out of their interaction with me. This begs many questions about the value that can be placed on such constructed accounts. How do these constructions relate to any underlying 'reality'? Can the 'truth' of the account be taken for granted - is it not purely subjective - and are there as many accounts as there are people, all equally valid? Might the account differ if it was told the next day, or if the person had been given more time to reflect, or if the interviewer was someone different? When I then throw into the mix my own attempts at interpretation of the account the idea of there being any one fixed reality that holds throughout becomes more and more of an illusion.

Writing by Michael Crotty (1998) proved helpful to me in working through these kinds of issues, and also in unravelling my confusions about what it was that I was trying to understand – the gardener, the experience of gardening, or the essence of gardening itself. Crotty uses the example of a tree to distinguish between different epistemological stances on meaning making. In objectivist epistemologies, a tree is seen as a tree,

'...regardless of whether anyone is aware of its existence or not. As an object of that kind ('objectively', therefore), it carries the intrinsic meaning of 'tree-ness'. (Crotty, 1998 p8)

Constructionist epistemologies on the other hand do not accept that there can be such a meaning as tree without a mind to give it that meaning. As Crotty (1998 p8/9) puts it, 'truth, or meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world...meaning is not discovered, but

constructed '. Within this epistemological position a tree can have multiple meanings – 'tree' will mean different things to a lumberjack, a city dweller or an artist, 'In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon' (Crotty, 1998 p9).

For a constructionist the meaning of trees arises from the interplay between the subject and the object, that is, meanings are not simply created by the minds of the individual but arise out of the building materials provided by the object towards which they are directed. As Crotty (1998 p45) observes, this idea mirrors the concept of intentionality central to phenomenological perspectives, 'Subject and object, distinguishable as they are, are always united. It is this insight that is captured in the term 'intentionality''. Within this perspective the meanings of tree are not fixed, there is no one true or valid meaning, there are multiple possibilities, but those possibilities are enabled and limited by the characteristics of the object itself. Some meanings are plausible, therefore, whilst others are not. Crotty distinguishes between a constructionist and a subjectivist epistemology. Within the latter the meaning of tree would be seen as being completely individualistic, with no tie to the characteristics of an underlying object; a tree could carry any meaning that the subject brought to it.

Individualism is further restricted within a constructionist approach by the historical and socio-cultural context within which meaning making takes place. Crotty draws on the work of symbolic anthropologist, Geertz, to clarify the point that the 'mode' of meaning making is circumscribed by the meanings that are shared within the culture at a particular historical time. Geertz suggests that it is limited to see culture as the outcome of human thought and action but rather it should be thought of as 'a set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, instructions ...for the governing of behaviour' (Geertz 1973 p44 cited by Crotty 1998 p53).

My research then is underpinned by a constructionist epistemology that is, I see the accounts of people's experiences, and my interpretations of them, not as truths which correspond with any underlying reality but rather as accounts which are both possible and plausible, in the light of the cultural context within

which they are embedded. Furthermore I see the range of meanings which people can construct about their gardening experiences, as being both enabled and constrained by the realities of the natural and social worlds with which they are interacting. I see the natural world as having properties and dimensions which are real, that is, they exist quite independently of our knowledge of them. In similar vein social systems act very much like natural phenomena, that is they exert influences in ways that are patterned, predictable and seemingly causal regardless of our awareness of them, however I see causality not as a something inevitable but as a possibility or tendency, which can be resisted or modified by a range of factors which may lie at the level of the individual or in the socio-historical context. I am influenced here by writers, who, whilst rejecting a pure form of realism have adopted a more 'subtle realism' especially Hammersley (1992), Silverman (2000) and Cresswell (1998). As indicated above my own position as investigator will also be influenced by the context within which I am living and working. Angen drawing on work by Gadamer, reflects on this interpretive stance,

'We live as if the world exists apart from us, but we only know it and understand it through our attempts to meaningfully interpret it, and those attempts at interpretation are in turn influenced by our temporal and cultural location (Gadamer, 1994)' (Angen, 2000 p385).

Within this position the subjectivity of the researcher is a given, there is no standing apart from the interpretation. As Maxwell writes, "As observers and interpreters of the world, we are inextricably part of it; we cannot step outside our own experience to obtain some observer-independent account of what we experience" (Maxwell, 1992 p283). In recognition that my own gardening experiences will impact on my role as investigator I have included my own gardening story in Appendix III. To summarize, my ontological assumptions, then, are in line with 'subtle realism', my epistemological assumptions constructionist, and my research approach interpretative.

Quality issues

I realised that I needed to clarify my thinking about these epistemological issues because they have a close relationship with how the quality of the research can

be determined. In positivist paradigms research rests on realist ontology - objects exist independently of our knowledge of them - with an epistemological position which holds that knowledge of the real world (empirically observed facts that correspond with the underlying reality) can be gained through the precise use of the appropriate methodological techniques so that validity and reliability are promoted. Within this view there are a number of assumptions and Angen (2000) has identified these. The first is that there should be distance between the researcher and the researched. This is seen as important for safeguarding objectivity – determination of the facts will not be influenced by the biased views of the researcher; the facts are assumed to be value free. A second assumption within positivism is that our observations and sensory perceptions will be reliable enough to ensure the accuracy of the data. Within this view the trustworthiness of the knowledge claim relies on the methodical, objective use of the correct techniques for collection and analysis of data. Validity (the correct measures were used), reliability (the same observations could be repeated by any observer) and generalizability (the sample was correctly selected as representative of the general population), although maybe expressed here in overly simplistic terms, are at the heart of truth claims within positive modes of research. Angen notes,

‘Grounded in a representational epistemology, positivist researchers depend on an external, foundational, ahistorical reality to which all knowledge claims can be compared and judged’ (Angen, 2000 p382).

In relation to my own research, although I have posited a (subtle) realist ontology in relation to the natural and social worlds, my epistemological assumptions are constructionist which rejects a straightforward correspondence between the reality and knowledge of the world and this makes claims for validity, reliability and generalizability difficult to make in the way put forward in positivist research. However I have not taken a subjectivist, ‘anything goes’ position which could mean that all truths are seen as equally valid and quality issues become almost an irrelevance. So it is still necessary for me to think about quality and how I can demonstrate that I have done justice to the subject and that the research warrants proper consideration. There have been multiple attempts to define criteria for measuring quality in qualitative research and a

plethora of concepts have emerged. Seale (1999 p467) reviews these attempts and concludes that 'this proliferation of concepts reflects the difficulties that qualitative methodologists, committed to creating some overarching system for specifying quality, have had in making their ideas stick' and he contrasts this to quantitative research where a reasonable consensus has been reached about concepts such as validity, and reliability. Seale puts this failure within qualitative enquiry down to two factors; the first is that the very stress that qualitative research places on 'creativity, exploration, conceptual flexibility, and a freedom of spirit' makes it difficult to find criteria that do not restrict or constrain these qualities and second that the proliferation of concepts are 'a marker of the paradigm shifts and crises of legitimation and representation, which have characterized "moments" in the recent history of qualitative methods' (Seale, 1999 p467).

Whilst reliability and validity are seen as separate concepts in quantitative methods, in qualitative enquiry they tend to be rolled into one (Golafshani, 2003) and numerous terms have been put forward to try and capture validity within the qualitative paradigm. These include 'trustworthiness', encompassing ideas of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); 'plausibility' (Hammersley, 1992); 'authenticity' (Lincoln, 1995) and 'rigor' (Davies and Dodd, 2002). Some of these attempts have been criticized because, in trying to establish fresh criteria by which the value of qualitative work can be assessed, authors have drawn on competing philosophical positions (Seale, 1999). Nevertheless a number of guidelines have been suggested for producing valid qualitative research including member checking, purposive sampling, peer review, inductive reasoning, thick description, triangulation (of sources, analysts and methods), and searching for negative cases (Pyett, 2003).

Seale suggests that the way through the mire of differing conceptions of quality criteria is to see qualitative research as a craft, one which can draw on a range of techniques for promoting quality which may have been developed under different paradigms with differing and contradictory philosophical underpinnings. He advocates mindfulness of the different underlying

philosophical positions but not an overly anxious concern about the inconsistencies. His then is, as he admits, a pragmatic and sceptical approach and, as such, useful for as he puts it,

'Intense methodological awareness, if engaged in too seriously, can create anxieties that hinder practice, but if taken in small doses can help to guard against more obvious errors.' (Seale, 1999 p475)

Angen (2000) develops the argument further. She suggests that in judging the quality of qualitative work it is more useful to think about *validation* rather than *validity* which is closely tied to realist notions of truth and certainty. Whilst rejecting the idea of certainty, she nevertheless accepts that some explanations are better than others, and the concept of *validation*, she argues, refocuses the researcher on to the *process* of trying to get as close as possible to the most plausible and coherent explanations, based on sound and convincing evidence. However this process relies not on specific techniques but rather on a sense of moral purpose and responsibility; Angen emphasizes the responsibilities of the researcher, since,

'In interpretive inquiry, there is no choice but to be responsible for choosing, and much of the craft of the inquiry process lies on the shoulders of the person conducting the investigation.' (Angen, 2000 p392)

In adopting the pragmatic approach suggested by Seale I felt it was helpful to identify the risks for quality in my research and consider how these might be mitigated as choices are made throughout the research process and to make these explicit. I have already indicated that I am trying to write a methodology which aims to be as transparent as possible. This is a reflexive approach which acknowledges that the researcher cannot be treated as separate from the research process, detached and impartial; as feminist authors, Stanley and Wise (1983 p262) observe, '[O]ne's self can't be left behind, it can only be omitted from discussion and written accounts'. I am trying - by writing in the first person, by setting out the twists and turns of my thinking and understanding - to make my role clear, and to indicate the assumptions and the compromises I am making and the resulting limitations that I see the work as having. Angen holds this approach as more important than matching specific criteria,

'How carefully the research question is pondered and framed, how respectfully the inquiry is carried out, how persuasively the arguments are developed in the written account, and how widely the results are disseminated become much more important issues than any criteria-based process of accounting that occurs after the research is completed.' (Angen, 2000 p387)

The transparency does not just relate to the methods employed but also to my willingness to make explicit my own experiences of gardening, and my pre-existing assumptions about the possible value of gardening for well-being. I constantly need to ask how these may impact upon the judgements I make throughout the research process.

Other than my general commitment to writing as transparent and reflexive account of my methodology as possible there are a number of other ways in which I have attempted to ensure quality and these will become clear in the following sections.

The sample

After the pilot interviews had been reviewed it was time to make concrete plans about my sample. In thinking about the sampling strategy and size of sample I bore several general factors in mind. The sample needed to be suited to the qualitative paradigm within which I was working, to the purpose of the study and to the particular questions I was aiming to answer, and it needed to be practically accessible within the resources I had available in terms of time and money. I also wanted a strategy that was flexible and could develop as the research progressed. I was seeking an approach to sampling that was going to give me rich information with the maximum chance of exposure to the full range of meanings that people attach to their experiences of gardening, an approach that has been called maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002). This approach involves purposively seeking participants who vary widely across the key dimensions that may be of interest, so that there is both the chance of finding unique characteristics and characteristics that are shared across cases along specific dimensions. My aim was not to select a sample that would be in any sense a statistical representation of the wider population of gardeners in the UK but rather one which would contain a wide variety of gardeners who could

be expected to have experienced gardens and gardening in diverse ways and in ways that were shared.

I knew that many people do garden out of necessity but have little real interest in gardening and therefore were unlikely to be of particular interest to me. I felt they could throw only limited light onto the topic and I did not want to invest resources in them. Being a keen gardener therefore became the first, and only, sampling criterion that was to be shared across all participants. I felt keen gardeners would most strongly represent the phenomenon of gardening, in other words they would be the most knowledgeable informants. This led to the question of how was I to define keenness? It seemed practically very difficult to lay down any specific measure of this so I adopted a common sense approach. If someone said they were a keen gardener or if they were readily identified as such, by someone else, then I was happy to include them in the sample. I made the assumption that being keen meant that they were doing more than the minimum activity required to simply maintain their garden, they were gardening through choice.

Sampling criteria

I settled on seven criteria, in addition to keenness, that would structure my initial selection process. These criteria seemed important either because they had theoretical relevance to the topic or because they helped ensure demographic diversity (often both were the case). My goal for the initial sample was to recruit participants who through their diversity along these dimensions could reasonably be expected, as Ritchie and colleagues put it, 'to ensure the inclusion of relevant constituencies, events, processes and so on, that can illuminate and inform' (Ritchie et al., 2003 p83). They go on to contrast the 'symbolic representation' of purposive sampling in qualitative research when a unit is chosen to both 'represent' and 'symbolise' a particular characteristic of relevance, and the statistical representation in quantitative research sampling using random selection to represent population distribution.

The dimensions of interest were: type of setting for gardening activity, gender, age group, ethnicity, geographical locality, family / relationship status,

employment status. To consider these in more depth, the experiences that had motivated me towards the research in the first place had involved professional contact with a woman whose only access to gardening was through tending a few containers on her balcony. Despite the limitations imposed by this restricted access to gardening I nevertheless felt she was gaining a lot from the experience. For this reason I did not feel that I wanted to limit the sample in my study to people who gardened in any particular way. I decided to look for people who gardened in a wide range of settings, for example in private gardens, on allotments, in window boxes, on balconies, and in community gardens. I felt that by being diverse with regard to this dimension then I was not only allowing for the different meanings that might arise in these different settings but also, by not excluding people without their own garden, I could be more inclusive in terms of class background and income. It is also possible that there are differences in the gardening settings that attract or are accessible to people at different ages so it was important to be sensitive to this.

I knew that both market research and academic research had found age, gender, and family status to be of significance in determining the meanings of gardening and also that there were differences in attitudes to gardening with regard to geographical locality with something of a north-south divide in the UK (Bhatti and Church, 2000, Buckingham, 2005, Mintel, 2005, Bhatti, 2006). I decided to include ethnicity as a criterion for consideration partly in an attempt to diversify the sample in demographic terms but also because autobiographical literature had alerted me to the very different ways some people from minority cultures experienced their gardens in comparison to those in the majority (Kincaid, 2000).

I developed a sampling matrix that I would fill in and monitor as I carried out the research. Rather than seeking a specific quota for each criterion I decided to concentrate on getting a diversity of participants but with a reasonable balance of men and women and people in the different age groups as these two criteria seemed important in theoretical terms and sufficient numbers would be needed if comparisons were to be possible.

Excluded groups

From the outset my aim had been to explore people's experience of gardening as a chosen activity in their everyday lives. I therefore excluded from the sample people whose gardening was being carried out in therapeutic settings, for example gardening clubs for people who had physical illness or mental health problems. I felt therapeutic gardening had already been quite well researched whilst everyday gardening had been explored far less. More importantly, in the context of gardening within a therapeutic setting, I reasoned that it would be difficult to distinguish between the impact of the gardening experience itself and other variables, such as the opportunity for interaction with people facing similar difficulties and the opportunity for direct support from therapists, which could account for feelings about the gardening club without necessarily relating in anyway to the activity of gardening itself.

Likewise I decided to exclude people whose paid work was centred on gardening. I felt that it would be difficult to compare their professional experiences with people gardening purely as a leisure time activity. Factors such as the financial rewards and the self-worth that can come from paid employment could complicate the picture and make comparisons between non-professionals and professionals difficult. I did however decide to include people if they were gardening voluntarily in a community garden of some kind. Whilst some of the same arguments applied to them, and I would need to be mindful of this in the analysis, I decided that they should be included as I wanted to compare the meaning of gardening across different settings and on balance I felt the advantages of inclusion outweighed the disadvantages. One person did reveal herself as having recently taken up professional garden design but as she spoke almost entirely about her own garden I decided to keep her in the sample.

The final group which I excluded were children. Although I was interested in childhood experiences I decided to access these retrospectively via the accounts of adults, rather than directly. This was a decision made for two main reasons. Firstly, for practical reasons - to extend the interviews to children complicated the study in terms of ethical permissions and in terms of recruiting children, though these obstacles would have been surmountable. Secondly I was

interested predominantly in adults and the meanings of gardening for them. My guess would be that, had I interviewed children, then the majority would have expressed liking for both gardens and for being outside, with all the connotations that these hold for play. Whilst this is interesting in itself, it tells me nothing about whether the children would go on to be keen gardeners, the target group of my research.

Sample size

After deciding on my sampling criteria I needed to think about the overall size of the sample. In qualitative research there is neither an agreed way of determining the correct size of a sample, nor is it necessary to decide the size of sample at the outset. My aim was to balance pragmatic concerns - the sample needed to be sufficiently small so that I could manage the data gathering, have the time or financial resources for transcription and time for detailed analysis, and yet sufficiently large so that I could capture the fullest range of experiences, meaningfully compare cases and possibly build some theoretical findings. I was not concerned with drawing any statistical inferences so the sample size did not need to be of sufficient scale to allow for statistical testing but it did need to be large enough for me to detect patterns and see differences between sub-groups within the sample.

I settled on twenty-five cases but reasoned that I could adjust the sample size as I conducted the research; if I found that I was not encountering any new information I could stop before that number as I would have reached a point of information or theoretical saturation. However I was aware that saturation is a difficult idea to actually operationalise, in part, because it is necessary to go beyond the theoretical point of actual saturation to realise that no new concepts are forthcoming. To go much beyond twenty-five cases I reasoned would be impractical as it would lead to too much data to analyse carefully even if new meanings were being encountered and moreover authors who have investigated saturation have found that saturation is encountered at relatively modest sample sizes (Mason, 2010); Bertaux (1981), for example, found that fifteen cases was generally sufficient to reach saturation.

The final sample

The final sample comprised twenty-five gardeners, sixteen women and nine men, aged 25–94 years. They gardened in a variety of settings from balconies, planters in communal gardens, through to large private gardens and allotments. Several people gardened in more than one setting. Full details of the participants are given in Appendix IV.

Accessing participants

Next I needed to think about how I was going to recruit participants. As I indicated earlier this was not difficult. People kept suggesting themselves, friends, family and colleagues and at first, for the pilot interviews, I made use of the convenience of this, though I did not interview people that I knew well as I did not want any pre-existing relationship to influence the kind of observations that someone was willing to make, nor did I wish to bias the study by selecting someone I knew in advance to have an interesting story to tell. As the study progressed, I realised that in order to get the spread of participants that I wanted, and to avoid the risk of bias, I would need to be more pro-active, and systematic and not rely on convenience sampling, as for instance I was not accessing many very young, or very old people, people from minority ethnic groups, or people who had restricted access to gardens. Patton (2002) argues that the danger of convenience sampling is that, choosing from whoever happens to be at hand, is frequently not underpinned by any systematic sampling strategy. I do not think I fell into this trap with my decision to adopt, at least initially, a convenience approach. There were so many offers to participate that I could afford to pick and choose amongst them to some extent. From the outset I monitored the sample for diversity in line with my sampling matrix, and when I realised that it was in danger of becoming unbalanced I modified my approach to recruitment. I decided then to contact organisations that could potentially put me in touch with likely participants. These included societies for older people, allotment groups, a students' union, gardening societies in inner city areas, and organisations linked to the annual Britain-in-Bloom contest. I received positive responses and recruited through all of these organisations except the students' union who did not respond.

I gave each organisation an outline of my research, and asked them if they could pass my details on to one or two of their members who might be called keen gardeners and who would be willing to be interviewed. I stressed my eagerness to recruit people with the particular demographic characteristics that were under-represented in my sample. Accessing younger gardeners and gardeners from ethnic minority groups in particular proved more difficult.

Place of interview

I asked each participant where they would prefer to be interviewed, but also told them that I would like to see the place where they gardened if this was possible. Most people agreed to be interviewed at home but one man asked me to interview him in the summerhouse at the residential home where he was a volunteer gardener. When I later asked him about his own home garden he quickly changed the subject back to the residential home and he offered few details of his home life, or home garden, whilst still being expansive about many other aspects of his life. Another person agreed to meet me at the station near to her home then led me to a nearby café where the interview took place. She did her gardening in containers in public spaces on a large housing estate as well as on her own balcony, so it was not in fact necessary to go to her home, but I felt she was keen that her privacy was maintained and this feeling was borne out in the interview when she gave away very little about her current personal situation, for instance glossing over her employment and relationship status. These encounters made me realise that I needed to be flexible and not assume that people would be willing to be interviewed at their home. They also raised theoretical questions for me about the links (physical and psychological) between gardens and home, and as I encountered such points I would make memos of them so that I could return to them later if necessary.

How the interviews were carried out

The approach to interviewing went through three phases. For the pilot interviews I started out by using an aide-memoire but found that this quickly became redundant as people were able, and willing, to share information about their gardening experiences with little prompting and asking them to tell their stories chronologically seemed sufficient to bring forth rich and relevant garden

related stories that were interwoven with recollections about other aspects of their lives - their work, homes, relationships. I could see that when people told their stories in their own way they automatically related their gardening activity to the broader concerns, issues and events in their lives, both psychological and social, yet when I attempted to introduce questions from the aide-memoire which I thought might be interesting, I felt I was disrupting their flow and often my questions seemed suddenly irrelevant. I therefore decided, very early on, to let the people I was interviewing determine the content of the interview with input from me only when I sought clarification, or amplification, or the person seemed to be drifting right away from the subject of gardening. For this reason the interviews were very different to each other and I knew this would ultimately make comparisons more difficult. It seemed more important to find a style of interviewing that allowed people to speak about their gardens and gardening in ways that seemed meaningful to them rather than to try and structure them too closely purely for the sake of making comparisons easier. As I relied less on the aide-memoire the interviews took on a more genuinely conversational rather than questioning tone. Most importantly I think by keeping the topics under the control of the interviewee areas of meaning which were not anticipated by my original aide-memoire were allowed to emerge. For example, the theme of gardening as a rebellious activity had not occurred to me, and certainly was unanticipated in the design of my aide memoire, yet came through as a strong theme in the third of the pilot interviews.

From the start the people I interviewed seemed to assume that I must be a keen gardener myself, though I never intentionally said this to anyone. I think this helped some people relax as they felt that we had an interest in common despite possible differences in age, sex, ethnicity, or background. Others, a minority, made another assumption, that I was an expert gardener, and I think this inhibited conversation at the beginning for some people who needed reassurance that I was not interested in judging their skills in any way.

By the third of my pilot interviews I had settled on a style of interviewing that was akin to what Flick (2002) describes as 'episodic' interviewing. This style combines narrative interviewing around some specific episodes within a life,

with more structured questioning around some key points in the story – the episodes - felt to be important and where there is likely to be cross case comparison. The narrative ‘story telling’ approach is said to aid recall because the form taken is usually chronological with inbuilt temporal markers around which the story can be remembered and recounted. Narrative approaches to interviewing permit the experiences of the participant to be at the heart of the story rather than asking them to describe experiences determined in advance according to the agenda of the researcher. The downside to this is that whole life narratives, even about a limited area of life such as gardening, can be very time consuming to gather and analyse but by focussing primarily on specific episodes this is avoided. The interviews carried out in the latter part of the process began to shift back to a slightly more structured approach. As I developed my ideas and interpretations, I would probe around these areas more deeply when they emerged in people’s stories.

All interviews were digitally recorded and stored as voice files to which I could return and listen to at any point. They were all, bar one where the recorder malfunctioned, fully transcribed and paper copies were made.

Analysis

In writing about my approach to data analysis I do not simply want to describe how I went about it but also want to set down the process by which I arrived at this approach, in particular I want to capture something of the untidiness of the process, its emergent nature and its roots in trial and error. I also want to show how the approach to analysis developed hand-in-hand with the development and clarification of my underlying epistemological position and also alongside the consideration of questions which were concerned with ethical aspects of the study.

Although written about under a discrete heading, analysis has in reality been threaded throughout the whole project from its very earliest moments. Even during my first musings and initial reading of the literature, analysis has been going on, as themes from these were recognised, synthesised, mulled over and compared with my own experiences and ideas. As I developed the aims and

research questions, and planned and structured the interview aide-memoire, more analysis was taking place as some ideas were modified or done away with, whilst others were promoted and developed in line with my first musings. For a long time I saw this activity in terms of ‘developing my conceptual framework’, which of course it was, but I had failed to recognise its inherent analytical character - I had unwittingly fallen into the trap of isolating analysis - at the back of my mind, seeing it as a technical process that would come later and I did not see that I was already on the analytical road before I had even started gathering data.

As described above, I embarked on carrying out and thinking about the pilot interviews, but at that stage I don’t think I saw myself as having reached the analysis stage ‘proper’ perhaps because what I was doing did not seem to match the texts I had read on qualitative data analysis. I was not consciously following any methodical steps, or organising or reducing the data in any definitive way. At that early stage, my approach, not that I thought of it in those terms, was simply to try to make sense of the interviews both during them and after them, in an intuitive way, as I would seek to understand any conversation.

I did go on to make a written summary of each interview, drawing on the transcripts, my remembered impressions, my field notes. I saw these summaries more or less as a reminder for myself and as a point from which to develop the next interviews. In these summaries I tried hard to capture the story or stories within each interview, highlighting what I saw as the key plots and turning points, the contradictions, the puzzles. All the time, both during the interview and in writing these notes, I was thinking back to my original question ‘what does gardening mean to this person?’ To help myself I thought of meaning with reference to gardening as ‘idea’, ‘place’ and ‘action’ (Francis and Hester, 1990). Themes emerged at this stage, some shared across cases, some particular to an individual case but noted as themes because of a recurrent pattern across a life.

I think it helps clarify things if I say that whilst I was thinking about the cases and writing the notes I knew at one level that this activity constituted analysis but at the same time I still saw the ‘real’ analysis as a different activity. I think

this contradiction arose for several reasons. First, I had unwittingly taken on the view that analysis was a discrete process with a specific technicality about it. I think this idea stems from the privileging that some analytical activities receive in the literature on qualitative methodology, even in writing that takes a broad and thoughtful approach to analysis. So for example Miles and Huberman ask themselves whether there are features that recur across diverse styles of qualitative analysis and whilst acknowledging that there are some ‘irreconcilable couplings’ (they cite social anthropology with its search for lawful relationships and phenomenology with its search for essences which may not transcend the individual) nevertheless go on to say,

*‘Still some analytic practices may be used across different qualitative research types. Here is **a fairly classic set of analytic moves arranged in sequence** [my emphasis]...*

- *Affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observation or interviews...’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994 p9)*

So I realise that I had envisaged qualitative data analysis as generally being a process whereby the data was first fractured, the elements of meaning isolated and then re-built into categories and themes shared across cases, from which some theory could then, perhaps, be fashioned. I think I had seen coding, categorisation and theme building as almost synonymous with qualitative data analysis. Maxwell (2005) points out that this is the part of analysis which tends to be described by researchers whilst other parts of the analytical process are probably undertaken but not put into words and he stresses the importance of realising that there are choices to be made between these categorising strategies and, what he terms, connecting strategies which seek not to fracture the text but to see it in its context and make connections within the different elements.

The second reason for my contradictory thinking arose out of my confusion at that point about my epistemological position. I was vacillating between a viewpoint that sees knowledge as something to be uncovered and revealed and a viewpoint which sees knowledge as something which is constructed. Kvale’s (1996 p3) *interviewer as miner* metaphor to describe the first position, and the *interviewer as traveller* metaphor to describe the second position are again

helpful. For a miner, knowledge is unearthed during the interview like nuggets of buried metal that remain ‘constant through the transformations of appearance on the conveyor belt from the oral to the written storage.’ Through the analysis that logically, within this viewpoint, can only take place after the unearthing, the ‘objective facts and the essential meanings are drawn out by various techniques and molded into their definitive form’. Kvale draws on the metaphor further describing the value of the end product as its ‘degree of purity’, and suggesting that this is determined by ‘correlating it with an objective external, real world or to a realm of subjective, inner, authentic experiences.’

In my initial belief that the analysis stage lay ahead and that it would involve a technical approach to separate out the meanings that were contained within the data, I was adopting the miner approach to knowledge, whilst in conducting the interviews and writing the summaries I was working within the alternative epistemological position, of researcher as traveller. Within that metaphor knowledge is seen as constructed; the researcher is seen as a traveller, as Kvale puts it,

‘...on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home...what the traveling reporter hears and sees is described qualitatively and is reconstructed as stories...the potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler’s interpretations; the tales are remolded into new narratives ’ (Kvale, 1996 p4).

After gathering data in my first post-pilot interviews I began *consciously* to work out my approach to analysis. I coded the first three transcripts. I took segments of meaning which could be just a few words, a sentence or a paragraph and labelled them with a code. I saw these codes as broad heuristic devices, rather than as precise labels with fixed meanings. ‘Childhood memories’ and ‘escape’ were examples of two of many codes which I came up with at this point. I began cutting and pasting sections of transcripts to different codes so that they could be retrieved more easily and dimensions within codes could be identified. As I worked I not only became bogged down in the task of managing the data but also felt increasingly alienated from it; I seemed to see less and less the more fragmented it became. The more I worked with the data

in this way exploring codes and attempting to discern further categories and themes the further I felt I was getting away from the meanings that had emerged in the summaries. I felt that whilst I was generating themes I was simultaneously losing the life course perspective which emphasises understanding within a context. In particular I felt that I was losing sight of processes, for example, how and why meanings such as 'escape' were developed and sustained for an individual. Chamberlain sums up how I felt,

'... much published research with its focus on coding tends to atomize the person, separating them from their context. Themes can become dangerously like variables, discourses can be identified but never connected to their function, narrative typologies can be differentiated but without any consideration of the work they are doing.' (Chamberlain, 2000 p292)

I realized that I needed to re-think my approach so that I was able to consider themes in a way that did not divorce them from the life course. I decided to take some of the transcripts and the memos attached to them and write them up fully as case studies. In making this decision I was not ruling out a later return to the first approach because I saw that, as a technique that would be useful when it came to comparing and contrasting cases but, first, I needed to get a better sense of how the themes were contextualized within lives.

In selecting cases to write up I bore several factors in mind. I knew that I could not write up all the cases in full. This would have been too costly in terms of time and would have been overwhelming. I needed therefore to select cases but any selection leaves me open to the charge that I have cherry picked cases to suit my theories. It is necessary to be transparent about such choices.

In making my choices there were some general considerations. I wanted the cases to be clearly illustrative of the key themes that had emerged from my initial intuitive readings and summarizing of interviews and initial attempts at coding. I wanted the cases to be as varied as possible in terms of the demographic and personal characteristics of the gardeners and I wanted them to reflect varied experiences of gardening. I felt that these variations would likely make cross case comparisons theoretically richer. There were also some specific considerations. I wanted a case that gave a long history of gardening to show

the continuities throughout a life. I wanted a younger gardener to contrast with the older gardener and I wanted a case where someone seemed to be drawing heavily on gardening during a transition in their life. Within these case studies I recorded quite extensive passages in the respondents' own words, I made explicit the themes that I felt were linked with the passages, so that my interpretations were exposed as interpretations and the plausibility of my interpretations could be considered by the reader. The case studies are presented in Appendix VI.

After writing up the case studies in full, and the other cases in a more abbreviated form, I returned to a more 'fracturing' approach to analysis. At this later stage I used MAXQDA computer software to aid the analysis. This software allows all the transcripts to be stored within one 'project' and makes coding, searching and data retrieval more manageable. I was not coming to the transcripts 'cold'. I had already read them as life stories and identified themes. This later stage of the analysis therefore was to systematise my readings, to make sure all the ideas in the transcripts were captured, and to allow easier cross checking across cases. I re-read each transcript and labelled segments (a sentence or a paragraph) which appeared to have a key idea/theme within them with a descriptive code. I then re-read the cases which had been labelled with a particular code to see what similarities and differences there were between them. I grouped similar codes under broader headings or themes. I made memos of interesting points. I explored the data for connections, for example, focussing on specific life stages and life events and seeing which codes and themes related most strongly to those particular times. I looked at cases which had unique codes to see how those cases might differ from the others.

Further thoughts on quality

I saw one of the easiest ways in which the quality of my research could be compromised could be through what has been termed anecdotalism (Seale and Silverman, 1997); that is the selection of evidence in a non-systematic way, purely to support pre-existing beliefs, and thus rendering the account implausible. Seale and Silverman suggest that this tendency can be countered by providing numbers so that judgements can be made about the strength of the

evidence, how ‘representative and widespread particular instances are’ and this is something I do adopt on occasion, however the unstructured interviews and varied life stories do not always allow straightforward counting. More important is to demonstrate a systematic search for disconfirming evidence and explanations. Careful description and analysis of deviant cases is closely linked and is important as deviant cases can of course be illuminating in their own rights, allowing richer and more nuanced understanding of the evidence. Triangulation (of method, analyst or sources) is often put forward as a way of ensuring validity but it can be argued that this concept itself rests on a realist rather than a constructionist epistemology. The concept comes from a surveying term with the idea that a fixed point can be arrived at by taking measurements from multiple perspectives, i.e. the ‘truth’ can be converged upon. I use multiple sources - interviews and autobiographical data - and in a sense see this as triangulation but not with the desire that a fixed account is reached but rather that the two sources will complement each other, and permit more detailed analysis with amplified and more complete understanding.

Autobiographical writing as a data source

I am now going to turn briefly to consider how I have utilised the autobiographical writing referred to above. I have not systematically analysed this in a way that corresponds to the analysis of the interview data. This would quite simply have been too onerous a task. However I have read the writings in full and have looked specifically for points of coherence with the themes identified within my own data. When I have found evidence of coherence I have then tried to see if there is any new interpretation that the autobiographical writing brings to my findings and, if so, have returned to my own data to see if any additional light has been shone on that. The aim in looking at the autobiographical writing was not to establish all of the meanings of gardening revealed in those texts but to use them in a much more limited way to add depth to my findings. The autobiographical writing shares many of the same limitations of my narrative interviews. They could be based on faulty or inaccurate re-call. They could particularly be subject to embellishment for the sake of making them more entertaining. These are risks but the autobiographical data also has the advantage that it has been written with

forethought. Several of my interviewees made the point that they had never before given their gardening much thought – they had just done it and responded to it - but they had not tried to capture its meaning in words, not even in their own reflections. By including the autobiographical writing I am attempting, where I see coherence with my own data, to add some of the depth of meaning which arises from deeper levels of reflection.

Summary of chapter

This chapter has taken a naturalistic approach to describing how the research was carried out. This was an attempt to write an honest account so that the decision-making was as explicit as possible. I see this transparency as being one of the ways quality can be assessed. However such naturalistic accounts can lose some of the clarity of more linearly structured ‘point by point’ accounts so I have therefore, for the sake of clarity, summarised my approach to the research in Table 1 on the following page.

Table 1: Methods and Underlying Influences

Ontology	Epistemology	Theoretical and methodological influences	Methods
Realist (Subtle)	Constructionist (Not Subjectivist)	Qualitative enquiry Life Course Perspective - Phenomenology - Interpretivism - Grounded theory - Biography - Narrative - Symbolic Interaction	Purposive (maximum variation) sampling Observation Semi-structured interviews Memoing/field notes Saturation Narrative analysis Case studies (Structure and content) Computer assisted qualitative data analysis Case by case comparative analysis (Thematic analysis) Negative/discrepant cases analysis Triangulation (sources)

Chapter 3

Review of Literature

The literature related to gardening is large, varied, and sits in many different disciplinary areas. In this chapter I do not attempt an in-depth critique of all the evidence but rather I try to provide an overview which gives a sense of the richness and diversity of the literature and shows how different authors have contributed to the complex picture of the meaning and role of gardening in people's lives. There are some bodies of work which I have chosen not to cover and the chapter sets out my reasons. I do not, for example, review the mass of literature on garden history, and instead I provide a 'timeline' which gives a sense of the important landmarks in gardening history and draws out some recurrent themes. I do not review the large body of works which relate to horticultural therapy but I do focus on some of the theoretical models which underpin these works; nor do I dwell on personal garden writings or poetry about gardening. As already indicated in the preceding chapter, both of these are drawn on as a further source of data to enrich and expand my own interview data.

In the face of so much potentially relevant, but very diverse, writing it has been important to make the literature review as coherent as possible; I have framed it in terms of the key opportunities that gardening provides and I look at works, from varied disciplines which explore these opportunities in relation to health and well-being. The opportunities are for contact with nature, for physical activity, for social interaction, for leisure and recreation, and for personal expression and meaning-making. I also make clear how my own work is placed in relation to these other works. Two key theoretical ideas and the evidence supporting them are considered. These are the concept of Biophilia and Attention Restoration Theory, chosen because they feature across much of the literature as explanatory concepts and underpin much horticultural therapy.

Overview: breadth of garden related literature

When I began to search for relevant literature I quickly realised that there is only very limited academic writing that specifically addresses the question of what gardens and gardening mean to ordinary people in their everyday lives and how these may relate to their health and well-being (Kaplan, 1973 , Unruh, 2002, Bhatti and Church, 2004, Bhatti, 2006, Bhatti et al., 2009). Despite there being an intuitive belief that gardening is somehow meaningful, and even good for us, a belief whose currency is demonstrated in everyday life in the pithy sayings found on numerous greetings cards, place mats, tea towels and so forth, there seems to be surprisingly little evidence available to substantiate the belief. It has been said that this is ‘a topic that is rich in lore and low in research’ (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1990 p238).

Kingsbury and Richardson (2005) comment on the gulf between academic writing, which tends to be about garden history, and commercial writing which tends to focus on practical matters of horticulture and plantsmanship. Moreover they suggest that there has been a measure of anti-intellectualism amongst gardeners and garden writers which has shored up the reluctance amongst academics to treat gardening seriously. Kingsbury and Richardson (2005 p4) call for a ‘serious critical discourse’ which might help ‘reveal the riches, of the subject to those...who might otherwise have dismissed the subject as unintellectual, irrelevant, old-fashioned, hobbyist, irredeemably bourgeois or simply uncool.’ This neglect of gardening as a subject worth serious scrutiny has been puzzled over by Cooper, a philosopher,

‘The designing, making and appreciation of gardens - and the comportment of lives within and in relation to gardens - have been of importance to men and women since the days of the ancient empires of Persia and China. In neglecting the garden, philosophy is therefore ignoring not merely a current fashion, but activities and experiences of abiding human significance. And that surely is puzzling.’ (Cooper, 2006 p2)

There is, however, a mass of other, more tangential work, from the sciences, the humanities, the social sciences and the arts, all potentially germane to the subject and all to be considered. There is, for example, a growing body of work concerned with the benefits of therapeutic horticulture much of it written by

practitioners in occupational therapy, nursing or social work (Sempik et al., 2003, Sempik et al., 2005); there is literature from the leisure sciences which reports on studies designed to assess the benefits of activities carried out in leisure time (Caldwell, 2005); works within sociology on the meaning of home and its links with ontological security (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998); research by environmental psychologists on the stress reducing effects of contact with the natural world (Ulrich et al., 1991); and reviews by experts in health promotion on the ways nature may be harnessed as a tool for promoting healthy living (St Leger, 2003). This is not to mention the vast collections of literature on landscape art and design, or portrayal of gardens in religious works; nor have I touched upon the huge volume of diaries, poetry, and commentaries, some current, some from generations ago, documenting personal experiences of gardening and gardens.

All of these works could shine a light onto the subject but their volume and disparate nature presented me with the problem of how to focus my reading, how to begin to make sense of the different genres, and how to integrate the various perspectives and research approaches of writers, from different disciplines, writing for such varied purposes. It would be an understatement to say that this has not been an easy task and it has been necessary to make choices, to compromise, and, perhaps most importantly, not to get too sidetracked by diverting material lying in blind alleys.

Historical and social context: A timeline

It is perhaps useful to pause here and reflect on some of the characteristics of gardens and gardening which might have given rise to this immense volume and diversity of literature, for this may, in its own right, tell us something important about gardens and gardening. First, the desire to make gardens, and indeed write about gardens seems to be timeless and cross all cultural and religious divides, however, I realised that the garden history literature would have to remain largely untapped. It was likely to offer insights into the major themes which have influenced different gardening styles throughout the centuries, and illuminate aspects of those times and cultures, but it did not seem of critical importance that I should carry out a thorough review for contextualising my

own research. Having said that, I think it is useful just to take a brief dip into this history. Rather than try and review the countless books of garden history I am going to take a simpler route and draw on a timeline, as presented by the BBC on their website (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2010). Such timelines can be useful both for highlighting some of the key moments in the changing face of gardening and for drawing attention to some of the continuities over time. Even then I will have to be very selective and simply pick out some of the key points, whilst ignoring many others. I feel this is valuable for providing a historical and social context for the experiences of the people I will be interviewing.

The BBC timeline (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2010) takes us back to the first evidence of ornamental gardens in Britain following the Roman invasion in 43 AD. It stresses the multiple use of the Roman garden for entertaining, dining, play and relaxation. It shows evidence of 12th Century images, captured on stained glass, of surprisingly familiar looking gardening tools; it identifies some of the first writing - about the sensual side of gardening - in the medieval poem 'Roman de a Rose' written by Guillaume de Lorris in about 1237, and translated into English by Chaucer. This was followed by another new genre, the gardening manual, in the form of a verse treatise, 'Feate of Gardening', written by John the Gardener in around 1401. The timeline records the apothecary gardens of the monasteries and highlights the early associations of gardens with healing. It shows royal patronage of gardens and gardening becoming important in Tudor times with the creation of some of the 'great' gardens, such as that at Hampton Court, gardens seen as expressions of power and supremacy.

The timeline takes us through the first of the gardening 'crazes' with the mania in the early 17th Century for certain newly imported 'exotic' plants, notably tulips, with vast sums of money being exchanged for single bulbs. It reflects the impact of political systems on gardens and gardening styles through its mention of attacks, in the Puritan years, on the frivolous nature of some gardening and the destruction of many gardens owned by the aristocracy. However it also shows that these attempts to suppress enthusiasm for gardening on a grand scale

were short-lived and Charles II, on his restoration to the throne, set about introducing a new formal style of gardening, emulating a style he had observed whilst in exile in France.

Over the following centuries, the timeline highlights the lives of some of the great names of garden design; William Kent, who sowed the seeds of the English Landscape movement which was taken up and developed by Capability Brown and Repton. That style, with its emphasis on sweeping open vistas, seemed to imitate nature, but in fact required massive movement of earth, the construction of new lakes and complete re-organisation of the contours of the ground, and was far from natural.

Gardening competitions became popular in the early part of the 19th Century, which gave collectors the opportunity to share and show off their collections. Such competitions have continued in many guises since those early days. In 1826 the timeline shows that the first gardening magazine, full of ideas and tips about planting schemes and gardening techniques, was published by John Loudon, who also campaigned for better wages for gardeners and who instigated the idea of 'breathing zones' - green belts - around cities. Throughout the Victorian era the pace of change in gardening matched the swift pace of industrial and commercial development. The new prosperity created a wealthy middle class who moved into the suburbs of cities and developed gardens of their own around their new villas, often using newly imported tender bedding plants for formal summer displays. Ornamental gardening was no longer the preserve of the landed gentry. The lawn mower was invented in the 1830's and this allowed manicured lawns to be maintained without a massive input of labour. Plant hunters travelled around the growing empire seeking out new specimens and developing the mass worldwide trade in plants. Formality returned to prominence as designers adopted styles of gardening which best framed and showed off the specimen plants. The abolition of the glass tax made greenhouses something less wealthy gardeners could contemplate. In 1867 the first garden gnomes were introduced to decorate a rockery garden made more attainable because of the development of pourable cement and artificial stone.

The Allotment Act of 1887 opened up the opportunity for many more people to grow their own plants and gardening moved to being a leisure time activity enjoyed by many urban dwellers, from all walks of life, albeit on rented plots and generally for the sake of food production. 1874 heralded the development of DDT for use as a garden pesticide, and we see the very beginnings of an approach to gardening which stresses modern scientific methods.

The Edwardian era heralded in yet another style of gardening, more rural in tone, and owing something to the Arts and Crafts movement with its emphasis on natural form and materials, and celebrating good design and local craftsmanship, whilst rejecting the artificial, the 'man-made'. Gertrude Jekyll, one of the first women gardeners to become a household name, was influential at this time. Previously a painter she brought a renewed awareness of colour to gardening and romantic themes, with exuberant planting and big drifts of colour in herbaceous borders, typified the age. Again this plentiful approach to gardening and exuberance was to be a trend cut-short by the onset of the First World War which saw many gardens being abandoned as men were called up. The inter-war years, with the great depression and financial hardship, did not see a resumption of extravagant gardening and low maintenance smaller gardens became the norm alongside the further expansion of allotments for food production. Those years did witness the first media gardener with a short radio series broadcast in 1934. The Second World War brought the need for even greater austerity and planting for utilitarian rather than decorative purposes; 'dig for victory' becomes the official message on gardening. In the post war years, interest in gardening has seemingly grown exponentially, encouraged by intense media focus. Interest has gone in all directions. There is copious consumption of new plants and new landscaping materials whilst at the same time a growing concern with environmental issues, and with gardening organically. DDT is banned after a century of use. The healing potential of gardens comes once again to the forefront. The timeline reports that 'there really is something for everyone'. Under the heading of 'contemporary garden' the timeline draws our attention to the multiple uses of the garden today – for play, for entertaining and for al fresco dining - in fact, much like the Roman gardens of 43 AD.

Themes in the timeline

I would argue that even this cursory and highly selective use of the timeline is helpful in showing that despite changing approaches to gardening, as a result of new plants, new materials and improvement to tools and techniques, what is apparent is how much has *not* changed. What seem to be constant are the desire and the drive to make gardens. There is an ongoing familiarity in the types of garden we create; images of Roman and medieval gardens are still instantly recognisable today. Garden practices have gone through cycles and gardening styles have come and gone and returned again. What is clear is that both fashions and usage, whilst seeming to be a matter of personal taste and individual agency, are also being shaped by the broader political and economic context, in which they are created. The timeline highlights some apparently constant tensions in gardening, between natural and more scientific or controlling approaches, between the formal and informal, between the exuberant and the constrained and between the utilitarian and the purely decorative. Whilst these tensions are ever present in gardening, it would seem that the external context exerts an influence on the exact swing of the pendulum.

The timeline shows other recurrent themes. Competition between gardeners is seemingly always present in one form or another; manifest in the compulsion to possess the latest plant, to create the grandest garden, to employ the most fashionable designer, to gather the most extensive plant collection or to grow the heaviest, largest or most perfect flower or vegetable. Yet, in the face of this competition, there is also the opposite, a recurrent theme of mutuality; a sharing of gardening knowledge, of garden space, of produce, and perhaps most importantly, a sharing of the garden as something of beauty. Francis and Hester (1990 p4) sum up this clash between opposing forces,

'In the garden as in society, there is an ongoing battle of seeming oppositions: male versus female, good versus evil, reaction versus revolution, self versus community, consumerism versus self-reliance, connectedness versus anomie, integration versus segregation, rich versus poor, real versus surreal, bigness versus smallness, sacred versus profane, science versus intuition, high versus folk art. ...In the garden these apparent irreconcilables are clarified and mediated because the garden accepts paradox. Anyone who has

ever gardened knows that a garden represents constancy yet is ever changing.'

Selection of literature for review

As well as reflecting the timeless nature of gardening, the diversity and amount of literature is also a reflection of the positioning of gardens and gardening at the interface of art and nature. This then brings writing from both sides of the divide, with some writers, (see Carter 2005 for review) critiquing the garden as art form or cultural expression, whilst others see the appreciation of gardening as being assimilated into our appreciation of the natural world. Still more literature arises from attempts to understand the attraction of the garden as resting on a combination of these two worlds, whilst others argue that garden appreciation is more than this. Cooper (2005 p11) for instance, contends that garden appreciation is 'distinctive and of its own kind' and is not properly captured by 'welding together the modes of appreciation suited to art objects and natural things respectively' and I will return to consider his viewpoint in more depth later.

The desire to showcase and celebrate individual gardens has led to a vast array of personal garden writing. I quickly realised that I could not begin to do justice to this even though some of the work would clearly have relevance. I decided to be selective and focus on a limited range of autobiographical writing but, rather than review it in the literature review, I am going to treat it as a further source of evidence to stand alongside and enrich my own interview data, so that my analysis can be extended and broadened. I have discussed this use of autobiographical writing more fully in my methodology chapter.

As I stated at the beginning of the chapter the literature about gardens and gardening is immense and growing rapidly. I have necessarily been selective and there will be omissions. There is one body of work which I have looked at, but have not reviewed here and that is the literature relating to horticultural therapy. It perhaps seems a significant omission as so much of the work speaks directly about the benefits of gardening for health and well-being, and clearly has relevance, so I want to clarify why I have chosen not to dwell on it. This

was for two main reasons. First, horticultural therapy is likely to have some similarities with gardening done in everyday life predominantly within domestic settings, but there are also likely to be significant differences. The context is dissimilar in a number of important ways:

- in ownership and levels of control
- in opportunities for free choices with regard to design and materials
- in the balance of the public/private face of the gardening activity
- in the nature of social engagement met through the gardening activity
- in the opportunities for, and nature of, personal attachment to the garden over time
- in involvement of professionals with a social or therapeutic role
- in the presence of other people with shared social and therapeutic needs and experiences

The second reason for not specifically reviewing the literature is that much of horticultural therapy is based on theoretical concepts and processes such as Biophilia and Attention Restoration Theory, which I will be considering, as these emerge from other bodies of literature. I feel it is important to explore these concepts without necessarily getting immersed in the detail of reports of the effectiveness of specific therapeutic regimes which might or might not have relevance.

Despite not reviewing it here, I have drawn on the literature and especially Sempik and colleagues (Sempik et al., 2003, Sempik et al., 2005), in one important way, and that is to support my thinking about the nature of the processes and inter-relationships between the individual and the different elements of gardening activity. Sempik et al (2003 p46) in their review of the evidence and messages from the social and therapeutic horticulture have produced a useful model of the processes, activities and outcomes of social and therapeutic horticulture. Their model is useful as it represents an attempt to integrate the social, physical, emotional, and spiritual elements of gardening and nature appreciation, showing the interrelationships. It also takes account of the passive and active components of gardening and suggests how both may be underpinned by innate factors, rooted in Biophilia a theory which I will consider shortly.

After ruling *out* much of the literature in this way, I was left with the question of what to rule *in*. It seemed important to focus primarily on the academic and research based literature, as it is this academic scrutiny which is so lacking in the subject area. However because the literature is derived from so many disparate disciplinary areas and written with different goals in mind, it has been vital to organise it in an ordered and coherent way. I decided to frame the literature in terms of the key opportunities that gardening affords and utilise this framework to systematically explore empirical and theoretical writing which considers the links between each of these opportunities and health and well-being. The opportunities lie in five areas:

- for contact with nature
- for physical activity
- for social interaction
- for leisure and recreation
- for personal expression and meaning-making

Each of the opportunities tends to be associated with work from different disciplinary backgrounds though there is some overlap. There would be other, equally valid, ways of categorising the opportunities but I have chosen these as they seem to make intuitive sense, reflect the way the literature is grouped, and very loosely follow the disciplines of environmental psychology, health sciences, sociology/social psychology, leisure science, and finally a less easily defined category which cuts across many disciplinary boundaries and includes contributions from philosophy, and literature. Whilst striving for coherence, it is inevitable that the different sections of the literature review will, to some extent, take on varied complexions and tones as they reflect the diverse research approaches and genres of writing of these different disciplines. I will concentrate on research which is directly related to gardening wherever possible but much of the work may be more tangentially relevant and some may be more speculative and interpretive rather than empirically based.

Placing my own work

The question arises about my own work and where this fits within the different groups that I have identified. There is no straightforward way of mapping it on to the categories given above. My study is qualitative, takes a specific life

course perspective, and considers gardening in the ‘everyday’. It aims to be explorative and illuminative. With this latter aim in mind, it draws on some more literary forms of writing - autobiographical writing and poetry – where these can bring additional illumination to my own qualitative data gathered through interviews.

In terms of both its focus on personal meaning, and its qualitative methodology, my work, perhaps, sits most comfortably with the category of literature concerned with personal expression and meaning-making. Most of that work has its origins in psychology, sociology, or social geography and generally uses qualitative methods, similar to my own. By using the literary sources mentioned, however, my work, also shares some degree of commonality with work, within that category of meaning making, which is written from a philosophical perspective, and which draws on wide ranging sources, including not only biography and poetry, but also myth and legend, to explore meanings that are arguably ineffable, impossible to put neatly into words.

However, in terms of my discussion, and the sense I try to make of the *processes* which might underlie the meaning making, I draw most heavily on literature from the first category, ‘contact with nature’ and also from the category concerned with leisure and recreation. Both of these bodies of work rest on a different methodological base to my work, generally taking a more directly empirical and sometimes experimental approach; in short they look at causation, but they provide ways of better understanding some of the mechanisms and processes which might underpin the links between individual meanings of gardens and the feelings of health and well-being that they engender. My work attempts to bridge the divide between the empirical literature (along with its associated models and concepts), which has a more explanatory focus, and the more phenomenological and philosophically based writings.

It also seems important to say that because of the amount and diversity of the literature this review is not going to be able to provide an in-depth critique of all the evidence presented. Rather, it will be concerned with mapping the

landscape, highlighting the diversity, and showing how writers from different disciplines, working within different paradigms, contribute to building a complex and rich picture of the potential role of gardening in people's lives.

Gardening as an opportunity for involvement with nature

*Any man that walks the mead
In bud, or blade, or bloom, may find
A meaning suited to his mind.*

~Alfred Tennyson

Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life!

~John Muir (*Our National Parks* 1901)

We are surrounded by poetic and other references to the attractions and benefits of involvement with the natural world but what is the evidence that these references are based on anything other than an overly romanticised version of the natural world? Even if we accept that we are indeed drawn to nature and that it 'does us good' there are a number of other questions which the poems, and much of the general gardening literature, leave unanswered. What underlies our attraction? What form does the 'good' take? How much natural contact do we need? Are all types of involvement with the natural world effective or just certain interactions? How does nature achieve its good? What is its scope - do we all benefit in the same way or just some of us? In this section I am going to review the academic literature which explores these questions.

Human attraction to the natural world: The Biophilia Hypothesis

It seems fairly evident that people believe exposure to nature is both attractive to and beneficial for human beings and this is, presumably, why urban areas are landscaped and parks are provided at public expense, why office foyers are decorated with large and expensive plants, and schoolchildren are taken to zoos and wildlife centres. The biophilia hypothesis has been advanced as an explanation, both, for our attraction to the natural world, and for some of the benefits accruing from that attraction. The term biophilia was first used by

Erich Fromm (1964) but has been taken up and developed by Edward Wilson and others, most notably Stephen Kellert (Wilson, 1984, Kellert and Wilson, 1993, Kellert, 2005).

In its most simple expression the biophilia hypothesis holds that human beings have ‘an innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes’ (Prologue to Wilson, 1984). By ‘innate’ Wilson is suggesting that humans have an instinctive, genetically based, propensity to affiliate with other life forms, and that this, through an evolutionary process, will aid genetic fitness and human survival. Wilson does not see biophilia as a single instinct but rather as a set of ‘prepared learning rules’, and he goes on to say ‘the feelings molded by the learning rules fall along several emotional spectra: from attraction to aversion, from awe to indifference, from peacefulness to fear driven anxiety’ (1993:31). By ‘prepared learning’ Wilson is referring to learning that is characterised by ease of acquisition, and resistance to extinction. The hypothesis rests on the belief that these genetically-based learned emotional responses such as attraction, awe and aversion, lead to behaviour that helps humans find food and water, locate shelter, avoid dangerous terrain, and keep away from harmful predators such as snakes and spiders.

However Wilson sees biophilia as being about much more than basic survival. He argues that,

‘...to explore and affiliate with life is a deep and complicated process in mental development. To an extent still undervalued in philosophy and religion, our existence depends on this propensity, our spirit is woven from it, hope rises on its currents’ (Wilson, 1984:Prologue)

Wilson allows that the genetic tendency may in fact be a weak one and he suggests that it has co-evolved in a relationship with culture, so for example, human attraction to colourful flowers may be genetically shaped learnt behaviour as this is a useful way of locating food sources, but humans are also likely to further develop that emotional attraction to flowers by building them into symbols, myths and metaphors which become part of the culture. Wilson (1993:33) talks of the,

‘...strong general tendency of human beings to translate emotional feelings into myriad dreams and narratives, and the necessary

conditions are in place to cut the historical channels of art and religious belief.'

Wilson argues that as humans have lived for ninety-nine percent of their history in small bands as hunter gatherers, closely interacting with, and relating to, the life forms around them, their bio-cultural evolution will still reflect this existence despite the fact that a majority now live in urban environments far removed from the natural world. He reasons that the biophilic learning rules are unlikely to have been replaced by modern versions equally well adapted to artefacts. Instead he sees them as continuing in a weakened form only intermittently being made apparent, sometimes in ways that seem disconnected from current experience 'fitfully manifested in the artificial new environments into which technology has catapulted humanity' and he cites the ways urban dwellers continue to dream of snakes, and drive long distances to walk along the seashore, for reasons they cannot fully explain, as an indication of this (Wilson, 1992:350, Wilson, 1993:32). Wilson (1984:12) acknowledges that we are caught between two worlds,

'The unique operations of the brain are the result of natural selection operating through the filter of culture. They have suspended us between two antipodal ideals of nature and machine, forest and city, the natural and the artifactual, relentlessly seeking in the words of the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, an equilibrium not of this world.'

Biophilic values

Kellert (Kellert and Wilson, 1993) has developed and extended the biophilia hypothesis by formulating a typology of what he terms 'values' which he believes are universal expressions of the biophilic tendency. Kellert originally devised a version of the typology as an instrument for categorising responses made by subjects in a long series of studies designed to evaluate how different groups of people perceive and value animals and nature. In these studies Kellert and other colleagues explored the perceptions of animals held by Americans drawn from across the US; the nature perceptions of diverse groups of people (hunters, birder watchers, farmers, and the general public distinguished by age, gender, socioeconomic status, and place of residence); the nature perceptions of

people in differing cultural settings in Japan, Germany, and Botswana; and the historical shifts in perceptions of animals in Western society (all cited in Kellert and Wilson 1993). Kellert found that though there were variations, sometimes of a significant degree, rather than simply being a useful tool for categorising responses, the typology was proving to be a reflection of universal expressions of biophilia. As Kellert says,

'The typology may be simply a convenient shorthand for describing various perspectives of nature. Its occurrence, however, in a wide variety of taxonomic, behavioural, demographic, historic, and cultural contexts suggests the distinct possibility that these categories might very well be reflections of universal and functional expressions of our species' dependence on the natural world' (Kellert and Wilson, 1993 p44)

Each of the nine biologically based values is seen by Kellert as conferring adaptive value in the struggle not only to survive but also to thrive and attain individual fulfilment (Kellert and Wilson, 1993 p59).

The values described are the ***aesthetic*** which refers to the physical appeal of and attraction to nature including a tendency to prefer natural design and pattern over man-made design and which may function as a way of achieving a sense of peace and harmony; the ***dominionistic*** which refers to mastery and control of nature and, as Kellert concedes, sometimes even the destruction of nature; the ***humanistic*** which refers to the emotional attachment to nature and especially to the companionship of domesticated animals; the ***moralistic*** which refers to the moral and spiritual relation to nature and includes ethical responsibility towards and reverence for the natural world which promotes kinship and gives order and meaning in life; the ***naturalistic*** which refers to having direct contact and experience of nature and encompasses a sense of wonder and fascination at the complexity and diversity of nature; the ***negativistic*** which refers to fear and aversion to nature which promotes safety, and protection; the ***ecologic-scientific*** which involves the study and empirical observation of nature and involves an emphasis on interconnection and interdependence in nature and promotes the building of knowledge and understanding; the ***symbolic*** which refers to nature as a source of metaphorical and communicative thought; and the ***utilitarian*** which sees nature as a source of physical and material benefits essential for

human sustenance, protection and security (Kellert and Wilson, 1993, Kellert, 2005).

Kellert then, like Wilson, sees the biophilic values as being about much more than mere survival, he asserts that developing these nine values can ‘foster physical capacity, material comfort, intellectual development, emotional maturation, creative ability, moral conviction and spiritual meaning’ (Kellert, 2005 p3-4). He acknowledges the likelihood that the biologically based inclination to attach value to nature is a weak genetic tendency, ‘whose full and functional development depends on sufficient experience, learning and cultural support’ (2005 p3-4).

Empirical evidence of the links between nature and well-being

Evidence, consistent with the assertions of Wilson and Kellert, and pointing to the benefits to be derived from contact with nature, can be drawn from studies carried out in a range of natural contexts. Some consider contact with untamed nature - nature in the raw - others look at contact in more managed settings such as national parks, whilst others consider domesticated settings such as parks, home and community gardens, and landscaped public spaces. Many studies focus on passive interaction/viewing of natural elements themselves, or representations of these in art work and photographs, and these are particularly useful for addressing questions of ‘dosage’ - how much contact with nature is needed to have an impact. Further research considers benefits arising from contact between humans and animals, both domestic and wild. Across all these contexts there are some consistent findings about the types of benefits to be derived from contact with nature and these can be separated out as lying in the mental, physical and social domains, although, as will be seen, benefits in one area tend to confer benefits in other areas, suggesting a possible synergistic effect.

Passive viewing of nature

On the benefits of passive viewing amongst the most cited work is that of Ulrich (1984). He had been influenced by research which had demonstrated that most people had an aesthetic and affective preference for natural rather than urban views, and that these natural views held people’s attention, elicited positive

feelings, and reduced fears. Ulrich hypothesised that recovery from stress and anxiety, such as that associated with surgery, might also be enhanced by such views. He studied the records of forty-six patients recovering from gall bladder surgery on the wards of a Pennsylvania hospital. The wards, on three floors, had rooms on two sides, one of which overlooked a brick wall, the other a view containing a stand of trees. The rooms were otherwise similar in terms of size and lay out and proximity to the nursing base. Patients had been randomly assigned to the rooms simply on the basis of next available. The same nurses cared for patients on both sides of the ward. Ulrich scrutinised ten years of medical records of the patients admitted over the summer months (when the trees had foliage). Patients were pair matched for a range of variables (age, sex, weight, previous history of operations, whether smoker or non-smoker, floor of hospital, and year of surgery) with one of each pair experiencing the green view, the other the brick wall. Ulrich found differences between the two conditions. Patients with the green views required less post-operative analgesia, had slightly fewer instances of minor post-operative complications, fewer negative evaluations reported in the nurses' notes, and left hospital sooner by a small, but statistically significant, margin. Ulrich concluded that the views of natural features enabled restorative functions to take place which reduced anxiety and stress and so aided physical recovery. He was tentative in his conclusions acknowledging that the urban view in his study was monotonous and this may have played its part in the outcome. He did not discount the view that another, more interesting urban view could have brought different results.

However other studies have reached similar conclusions on the benefits of passive interaction with nature and its impact on pain and other physical symptoms. Diette et al (2003) found that patients undergoing flexible bronchoscopy at a Baltimore Hospital reported less pain than a control group, if they were able to view pictures of natural scenes and hear natural sounds before, during, and after the procedure. Prisoners randomly assigned to cells with views of farmland and forest reported less instances of sickness to the medical services, than those matched prisoners who had only an internal view of the exercise yard (Moore, 1981). In experimental work, Parks and colleagues (Park et al., 2004) found that tolerance for pain was greater amongst subjects in

simulated hospital rooms with foliage plants than in identical rooms without the foliage. Chang (2004) measured psycho-physiological reactions of people from different cultural backgrounds (American and Taiwanese) to pictures of different landscapes, (city, forest, water, park, and mountain) and found that the psychological benefits (e.g. anxiety reduction) associated with the most satisfying views of nature were closely correlated with physical benefits (e.g. reduced heart rate).

Other studies have broadened thinking about the range of benefits that can be derived from viewing nature. Rachel Kaplan's (2001) research looked at responses to differing views out of domestic windows and found that views of nature were associated with higher rates of life satisfaction and diverse aspects of a sense of well-being, including effective functioning and being at peace; scenes of built elements were associated with life satisfaction but not well-being. She concluded that window views of nature afforded many short opportunities for psychological restoration, a theoretical position that I return to below. Shibata and Suzuki (2004) found that simply having a foliage plant within view, in a room where students were given cognitive tasks to perform, enhanced the mood of the male and female students and the task performance of the female students, though it was unclear as to the reasons for the gender differences. Similar findings were reported by Tennessen and Cimprich (1995) who measured the capacity for directed attention, that is the ability to focus and concentrate, of students whose dormitory rooms had been graded for views of nature. They found a strong positive association between capacity for attention and natural views. The presence of plants has also been found to increase productivity and lower the stress levels of office workers (Lohr et al., 1996) and increase positive reports of job satisfaction (Randall et al., 1992).

Many of these studies put forward Attention Restoration Theory (ART) developed by Rachel and Stephen Kaplan (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989, Kaplan and Kaplan, 1990, Kaplan, 1995) as a possible explanatory theory underpinning their findings. Although the findings of these various studies all point towards the benefits of nature, methodologically not all are robust (Frumkin, 2003). Sample sizes are often small. Potential confounding variables are not

consistently controlled for, so associations could be spurious. Some of the most careful work on the restorative benefits of nearby nature has been done by Kuo, Sullivan and colleagues. They have explored the impact of having a view of nearby nature on effective life functioning including coping with poverty (Kuo, 2001), and on levels of aggression and violence amongst residents of urban public housing (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001). The theoretical framework on which they build is also ART and since they have approached their work in a methodologically robust way and have also attempted to test ART as the theoretical underpinning of their claims, their work is worth looking at in some depth, and I will return to that shortly, but first will consider ART.

Attention Restoration Theory

ART is one of the major theories put forward to explain the processes underlying the psycho-physiological benefits of nature. It holds that to function efficiently and optimally cognitive attention needs to be deliberately directed on the specific task in hand. The Kaplans argue (citing Simon 1978) that in humans directed attention is a limited resource and the effort required for it ultimately leads to mental fatigue and ‘since such fatigue makes one less competent, less pleasant, and less happy, recovering from it is a matter of some importance’ (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1990 p241) The Kaplans assert that being in a natural environment, or even passively viewing nature, in pictures or through a window, offers respite from this mental fatigue because viewing nature does not require the same directed attention, it is, in comparison, effortless. Nature, then, is seen as a restorative environment that facilitates recovery from mental fatigue and with recovery comes renewed capacity for further directed attention, competence and efficiency. ART may have been new in terms of formalised theory but it was certainly not new in terms of the ideas underpinning it; Frederick Law Olmsted wrote in 1865, that being in a natural setting,

‘...employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system’ (Olmsted, 1995)

The Kaplans (1990) have identified four key elements necessary for an experience to be restorative. First is ‘being away’, that is the experience offers

opportunity for escape or withdrawal from routine tasks or surroundings. Physical separation is less important than conceptual separation; being in a place which triggers a switch to thinking which focuses away from the pressures and stresses of everyday life (Scopelliti and Giuliani, 2004). The second element is 'fascination' and here the Kaplans were referring to the opportunity for having one's attention held - as opposed to drained - through the inherent interest of the environment; they draw on William James' concept of involuntary or effortless attention. Third, they identify 'extent', the amount of scope a setting affords for exploration and learning, whilst still seeming coherent, connected and legible. The fourth element is 'compatibility' and by this they mean that for an experience to be restorative there needs to be compatibility between the desires of the individual and any actions required by the environment. They give the example of the inclination of a gardener to garden organically being compatible with the needs of the environment, where the relationship between gardener and environment is congruent and not one of struggle and tension.

Exposure to nature, cognitive functioning and problem solving

In Kuo's (2001) study of coping with poverty she asks whether having nearby nature in the form of trees and grass can assist people's capacity to tackle the critical issues in their lives (Kuo, 2001 p6). Three hypotheses linked to ART guide the study. First, that the capacity to deliberately direct attention is important not only for day-to-day functioning but for the management of major life issues. Second, that relatively low levels of nearby vegetation are sufficient to reduce attentional fatigue and third, that by reducing attentional fatigue, the presence of nearby vegetation enhances the management of major life issues (Kuo, 2001 p10). The study draws on evidence gathered in a field setting, an area of public housing in Chicago, which Kuo argues offers 'a rare combination of methodological requirements for studying the effects of nearby nature'. The housing blocks in the project are identical in size, structure, layout, number of dwellings, level of maintenance, and location in relation to the highway, and only vary in terms of nearby vegetation. Some blocks are surrounded entirely by concrete paving - the original trees and grass having died away - whilst other blocks still had views of, and access to, pockets of the original planting. The

tenants played no part in influencing the upkeep of, or protecting, the environment around the buildings, and had been randomly assigned to the blocks. Residents were homogeneous in relation to many of the determinants of effective life functioning; Kuo examined income, educational levels, life circumstances, and economic opportunities. The characteristics of the field setting meant that the number of confounding variables was at a minimum.

Kuo's team conducted a series of interviews and attentional tests with 145 residents, all heads of household under age 65, from 18 blocks, and compared self-reports of management of major issues and attentional performance for residents living in buildings with high versus low levels of nearby vegetation. Great care was taken in selection and training of interviewers who were matched as closely as possible with the public housing residents to make sure that issues of power or cultural difference did not undermine the data gathering phase. There was independent rating of the vegetation conditions pertaining to each of the blocks that were sampled, some blocks having been excluded because they were close to parks or other facilities which could have had an impact on their life functioning. Blocks were classified as barren or green and greenness was rated on a scale of 0-4 (no green to very green). A standardised neuro-cognitive measure (Digit Span Backwards Test) was used to assess attentional functioning and a new instrument (The Ineffective Management of Major Issues Scale: IMMI) was developed for assessing life functioning. This instrument had items which captured the participants' major life goals, their major problems and major life decisions and items which focussed on their effectiveness in managing these, in terms of how difficult the issues were felt to be, whether dealing with them had been neglected, the length of time the issue had been ongoing, and the severity of the issue in term of its impact on their life. Kuo's team were assiduous in their search for possible confounding variables and through the questionnaires sought additional information regarding a whole range of factors that might have affected life functioning so that these could be statistically controlled. These included age, marital status, education, employment, years in public housing, health status, use of alcohol, use of prescription and other drugs, and levels of social integration; in total twenty-three possible confounding variables were considered.

The residents living without nearby vegetation were found to be significantly less effective at managing their major life issues, reporting more delay in tackling their major problems, and assessing their issues as more severe, less easy to resolve, and more entrenched than their counterparts with greener surroundings. These residents were also found to have consistently lower scores on the tests measuring attention, suggesting that attention was the mediating factor. Extensive analysis revealed no confounding factors and Kuo concluded that the only reliable explanation for the findings was Attention Restoration Theory – ‘exposure to nature causes attentional restoration, thereby enhancing life functioning’ (Kuo, 2001 p26).

Kuo (2001 p7) comments on the persistence of positive effects in a whole range of studies that have looked at exposure to nature, despite many of these studies having low power. She reviewed sixteen studies and noted that fourteen of these had found statistically significant effects but of these fourteen, only five involved extended exposure to a truly natural setting, five involved only exposure to what she terms ‘surrogate nature’ e.g. pictures of nature, and almost half the studies had extremely small sample sizes (n =less than 20 in each condition). In addition ten studies involved field settings where there was no experimenter control of the conditions, thus increasing the within condition variability and decreasing the power. Kuo argues that in the light of these conditions ‘the presence of null findings is unsurprising and the persistence of positive findings may point to a large, robust effect’ (Kuo, 2001 p7). She draws on statistical principles for calculating power, citing Howell 1982, and suggests that such studies ‘with high within-condition variability and low sample size will only reliably find effects if the effect size is large.’ Drawing on this whole body of work Kuo (2004 p32) argues that natural vegetation should be seen as far more than an amenity and should not be treated as an afterthought in municipal planning,

‘Recent findings indicate that individuals with greater contact with nature are more effective in addressing the most important challenges in their lives, handle conflicts in less aggressive ways, and are more effective in self discipline.’

The studies referred to above were, in the main, fairly small scale but there have been larger epidemiological studies which have attempted to look at the impact of green space on health. Maas and colleagues (2006) looked at the relationship between the amount of green space in people's environment and their perceptions of their general health. They gathered results for 250,782 people living in the Netherlands in both rural and urban areas and found that green space within a one kilometre and a three kilometre radius of the home has a significant association with perceived general health and this held for all levels of urbanity. They found a greater effect amongst people of lower socio-economic status and for the people living in the larger cities the relationship was strongest amongst youth, the elderly and those who had only achieved secondary level of education, all factors which might increase the chances of people spending more of their time close to home. As the authors themselves acknowledge the results could be influenced by self-selection bias, with healthier people who value green spaces for their health, moving to areas with more green space, but this is seen as unlikely because arguably the group with lowest opportunities for moving to greener areas - those with the lowest socio-economic status - was the group where the relationship between health and green space was seen most strongly. This study was correlational and did not explore underlying mechanisms; the authors suggest stress reduction associated with attention restoration but it is possible to put forward alternative explanations for the findings such as better air quality or more opportunities for social interaction. The findings have been generally confirmed by a study of English census data from 2001 which determined the amount of green space available in an area and the rate of self reported 'not good' health (Mitchell and Popham, 2007). They found that a higher proportion of green space in an area was associated with better health. The association held in all urban areas and rural low-income areas, but there was no significant association between green space and health in higher income suburban and higher income rural areas. One possible explanation put forward is that these residents have their own domestic gardens, and municipal green space is less important to them.

Animals, links with health and well-being: the empirical evidence

Having a garden is associated with increased rates of pet ownership (Murray et al., 2010) and there is a considerable body of research which attests to an association between contact with animals / pet ownership and different elements of well-being, both physical, and mental (Beck and Katcher, 1983, Barker and Wolen, 2008). In a study conducted in Australia, amongst 6000 patients of a cardiovascular clinic, pet owners were found to have lower blood pressure and better blood lipid profiles than non-pet owners, after a range of confounding variables such as income and exercise levels were controlled for (Anderson et al., 1992). Friedman and Thomas (1995) looked at 1 year survival rates of 369 people (112 pet owners) for whom they had gathered ancillary data on a wide range of variables known to be associated with coronary heart disease - social circumstances, including pet ownership, social support, life events, levels of anger, coronary prone behaviour, anxiety and depression. They found that there was a significant association between survival rates and pet ownership, and owners of dogs were found to be six times less likely to die in the one year follow up period than non-dog owners. Having human social support was also found to have a significant association with one year survival rate. These findings were independent of other psychosocial factors and physiological measures. A 10-month prospective British study (Serpell, 1991) of 71 people who had newly acquired a pet also reported significant improvements in self-reported health and in significant reduction (i.e. improvement) in their scores on the General Health Questionnaire, when contrasted with a control group of 26 people matched for age, sex-ratio, income, housing and health status. So far these studies have attested to the links between physical health and animal ownership. A number of other studies have emphasised the associations between contact with animals and psychological health and well-being (Sable, 1995, Barker and Dawson, 1998, Wells, 2009). However the evidence on both physical and psychological benefits is far from clear cut as not all studies have been able to replicate these findings (Lawton et al., 1984) and some researchers have even reported adverse associations between pet ownership and psychological health. For example Parslow and colleagues (2005) in a large scale Australian study found poorer physical and mental health amongst pet

owners in the age group 60-64 when compared to non-pet owners in the same age group. McNicholas et al (2005) review the evidence and agree that much is contradictory; they argue that health is being defined too narrowly, in terms of precise measurements of physical health, at the expense of considering the role of pets in people's lives, both in terms of supporting social relationships in general and directly through acting as a companion. They argue that both of these routes are likely to confer physical and psychological benefits, through stress buffering, and lead to healthy outcomes.

Gardening as an opportunity for physical activity

Gardening affords many opportunities for exercise and numerous studies attest to the health benefits of regular physical activity. An association has been reported between physical activity, and reduced mortality rates from all causes, reduced risk of coronary heart and cardiovascular diseases, a lower incidence of, and fewer complications from type 2 diabetes, reduced levels of harmful cholesterol, and a reduced rate of some cancers, notably colon cancer (Magnus et al., 1979, Berlin and Colditz, 1990, Caspersen et al., 1991, Giovannucci et al., 1995, Andersen et al., 2000, Lee and Paffenbarger Jr, 2000, Byberg et al., 2001). There has been a gradual shift in thinking, away from the belief that to be effective physical activity needs to be vigorous and undertaken at least three times a week, towards the view that more moderate levels of activity undertaken more regularly are in themselves valuable (Stofan et al., 1998, Wannamethee and Shaper, 2001, Erlichman et al., 2002) though perhaps not as effective as vigorous exercise (Lee and Paffenbarger Jr, 2000) As these moderate levels can be achieved through the activities of daily life they are more likely to be sustained and gardening is frequently identified as one of the key ways in which people achieve such moderate levels of physical activity (Folsom et al., 1985, Yusuf et al., 1996, Wannamethee and Shaper, 2001). The benefits of physical activity continue even into extreme old age (Stessman et al., 2009) and gardening, alongside walking is seen as likely to be continued into old age whereas other types of exercise are known to decrease with age (Caspersen et al., 1991). This is particularly true for women where overall levels of physical activity are less than men (Dannenberg et al., 1989).

Most of the studies looking at links between physical activity and health outcomes are large scale epidemiological studies and in terms of sample size are robust, however, because of their sample size the majority rely on self reports of physical activity rather than actual observation or physical measurement and the reliability, validity and sensitivity of self-report questionnaires have been called into question (Klesges et al., 1990). Shephard (2003) in a review of measures of physical activity finds that there is a general failure to ascribe precise biological meaning to terms such as light, moderate and heavy exercise and sees attempts at detailed interpretation in terms of exercise dosage and the extent of resulting health benefits premature. Despite such reservations gardening, alongside other activities such as walking and cycling, has been endorsed in national policy guidelines as a means to maintaining the levels of physical activity likely to promote physical health (Pate et al., 1995, Haskell et al., 2007).

In the studies cited above, gardening has been just one of several lifestyle and/or work activities seen as contributing to overall levels of physical activity, and based on their evidence it is difficult to say whether there are any particular advantages to gardening over and above other physical activities. A study by Park et al (2009) has tried to address this issue. Their study of physically active older adults (58 years+) compared *active gardeners* (more than 150 minutes gardening per week at moderate intensity), with *gardeners* (120-150 minutes per week at low and moderate intensity), and *non-gardeners* (low or no gardening activity) and found that 'although all the subjects were healthy and active, the active gardeners had better physical health, and hand strength, and the only distinction for this group was they gardened' (Park et al., 2009 p209). Turner (2002) found higher bone density values in older women to be associated with gardening compared with other physical activities, though this finding was not replicated by Park et al. Whilst the study by Parks et al attempts to expand understanding of the specific health benefits of gardening for older people their sample size was very small (N=58) and so their claims have to be viewed with a degree of caution. A study by Caspersen (1991) of older Dutch men found that total weekly physical activity and, specifically, gardening and walking, demonstrated generally favorable associations with cholesterol and systolic blood pressure after controlling for confounders such as dietary differences.

Van den Berg and Custers (2011) found that in allotment gardeners who were given a stressful task to undertake and were then randomly assigned to either 30 minutes of gardening or 30 minutes reading, the group which gardened showed significantly greater decreases in salivary cortisol and reported significantly better mood at the end of the recovery period. The authors claim to be the first to have experimentally demonstrated a direct causal connection between the physical activity of gardening and recovery from stress.

Gardening as an opportunity for social interaction

This section looks at literature that makes reference to gardening as an opportunity for social interaction and I include here gender relations and social inclusion. This part of the literature review will be relatively brief as there is only a small body of literature which specifically explores gardening in domestic settings in relation to social well-being (Grampp, 1990). Much of the literature that highlights the social outcomes of gardening relates to social and therapeutic horticulture and, for all the reasons stated earlier, I am not going to focus on that particular body of work. There is more literature that considers the social aspects of community or allotment gardening, which is to be expected as these are by definition social settings and community gardens are frequently established for the sake of enhancing communities (Glover, 2004). I will take account of some of the key findings that emerge from the research on allotment and community gardening, however a review of this work need not be exhaustive as my focus is not on these specific gardening contexts but on understanding the role of gardening more generally, across all settings encountered in everyday life.

A number of authors (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989, Dunnett and Qasim, 2000, Clayton, 2007) have identified social benefits as motivators for domestic gardening, and these were also closely associated with gardening satisfaction. Gross and Lane (2007) in their study of gardeners, which takes a life span approach, highlight the importance, particularly for children, of ‘people in the garden’; gardeners recollecting their childhood gardens usually talked about ‘we’ rather than ‘I’, and in adulthood used the garden, sometimes unconsciously, as a site for the preservation and maintenance of memories and

relationships. Bhatti and colleagues (2009 p72) remind us that the garden should not be seen in isolation from the home but is best seen as a 'homely' site and, as with the home is,

'...equally a form of 'cultivation' of social relationships (Casey 1993:291), motivated by a complex range of emotional/social processes that speaks of, and to, longing and belonging, domestication, family, work and play, love and death – in short the range that characterises everyday life'

Freeman et al (2012) in a study of New Zealand gardeners reported a range of ways in which gardens and gardening helped forge and sustain social relationships with family, neighbours and the wider community, and studies carried out in the UK have described similar findings (Dunnett and Qasim, 2000). Freeman and colleagues highlighted such things as satisfaction in mutual gardening, gardening as a point of communication between generations, the sharing of produce with neighbours friends, and the local church, gardens as sites of sociable activity such as family games, meals or barbeques. They also talked about gardeners being seen in positive terms, even by non-gardeners; there was a sense for some that gardeners contributed to the general good.

So far the importance of gardening for social relationships has been stressed but some authors have found this element to be less important than other aspects of gardening. Ashton-Shaeffer and Constant (2005) looked at older adults' motivations to garden and found that social interaction and friendship were lowest on the list of motivations; physical fitness and creativity/aesthetic motivations were given as the most important. Hui-Ping Cheng et al (2010) who also looked specifically at the satisfactions older people derived from leisure gardening, found social components to be the least important out of six components of leisure satisfaction; relaxation, psychological, and physiological components were the elements most strongly associated with life satisfaction. These findings both relate specifically to older people. Ashton-Shaeffer and Constant (2005) suggest that older people's motivations to garden relate to gardening as a valued private and solitary activity and this might suggest that variations in terms of gardening motivations and satisfactions which are

age/stage related and point to the importance of studies which take a life course approach.

Bhatti and Church (2000) highlight the garden as a gendered space, with men and women relating to the space in very different ways. Francis and Hester (1990 p4) described gardens as battlegrounds for opposing forces and they highlighted 'male versus female' alongside other oppositions. Bhatti and Church (2000) acknowledge literature which has traditionally described the garden as a space controlled by men, a space which confirmed patriarchy, and they found some evidence for this, but they also found that for some of their respondents it was a space where gender relations were not fixed, 'a location where gender divisions cannot not only be reinforced but to some degree re-negotiated' (Bhatti and Church, 2000 p192). For women, they found, the garden could be a place for creativity and artfulness, often to a greater degree than the interior of the home and this made a powerful impact on the women's search for personal identity. Parry and colleagues (2005) looked at gender relations within the context of community gardens as sites of leisure and found that these were places where gender roles and relations were both resisted and reproduced. Whilst some tasks were distributed along gendered lines it was generally women who allocated the tasks and took on positions of leadership and decision-making within the garden. Some women found themselves newly empowered by their involvement in the leadership of the gardens and went on to seek new opportunities, roles, and responsibilities outside of the garden.

As I indicated earlier most of the research which provides evidence of the social outcomes of gardening relates to more public gardening contexts and particularly community gardens. It is important to recognise that social benefits can accrue at different levels: to the individual, to the organization and to the community and may be achieved through passive as well as active involvement in the gardening (Westphal, 2003), though, as Armstrong (2000) points out, there is a great deal of interrelatedness between these three and also links with ideas of social cohesion and social capital. At the individual level involvement in community gardening has been associated with increased social networks and social ties, with commensurate opportunities for increased social

support (Armstrong, 2000); decreased social isolation and increased social inclusion (Milligan et al., 2004); increased opportunities for developing cross cultural relationships (Shinew et al., 2004), better cultural awareness, and understanding, thorough shared experiences and food sharing (Wakefield et al., 2007); increased opportunity for meeting others from ‘different walks of life’ (Sigelman et al., 1996, Kingsley and Townsend, 2006) and increased political and civic engagement (Armstrong, 2000). Social interactions of community gardeners encompass interactions with people outside of the garden and with many official organisations who may be supportive of the garden, for example, local government, universities, banks and non-profit organisations (Draper and Freedman, 2010).

I have concentrated on social outcomes at the individual level but as Glover et al (2005 p80) observe, ‘communal projects, like community gardens, can develop important capacities by exposing citizens to the connection between their private interests and the public interest’. At the levels of the group and the wider community, community gardening is associated with enhancement of the broader neighbourhood through better tending of private areas, and with developing new community resources such as retail outlets (Armstrong, 2000); with increased levels of civic participation and volunteering outside of the garden (Ohmer et al., 2009). Glover and colleagues (2005) find an association between community gardening and democratic values but without further research are unable to say with certainty whether this is a causal relationship and in which direction the causation goes, although there are some indications that the gardening promoted democratic values. Much of the above research into community gardening has been conducted within the discipline of leisure science and I am going now to turn to look more specifically at research which concentrates on leisure and considers the particular outcomes of leisure activity.

Gardening as a leisure activity

A rapidly growing body of literature which can throw some light on the benefits to be derived from gardening is that found within the leisure sciences. Interest in the outcomes of leisure has up until fairly recently been of marginal concern to academics and health care professionals and some would claim that adult

leisure, in particular, has been undervalued and treated as trivial (Caldwell, 2005). It has also been argued that research within leisure science does not always generate cross disciplinary interest, for example, research on ageing and leisure, carried out by leisure scientists, has not received much attention amongst academic gerontologists, possibly as a result of the different ways leisure is conceptualised and defined across these disciplines (Gibson, 2006). There is however strong common currency in the idea that a life with a good balance of work and leisure is desirable and likely to be a healthier one, and the leisure industries have seen rapid growth over the last few decades, with a commensurate growth in academic interest.

Defining and conceptualising leisure is not necessarily straightforward; there are, for example, so called 'residual' definitions where leisure is seen predominantly as activity done in time left over from paid employment or other obligations, and 'experiential' definitions which incorporate ideas of activity engaged in by choice for their intrinsic satisfaction or pleasure (Haworth and Lewis, 2005). Cassidy (2005 p52) suggests leisure is perhaps best viewed as, 'another life domain' and that 'the experiences that occur during leisure can impact on health and illness just as experiences in other domains such as work'. Cassidy highlights the potential of leisure to produce stresses and strain as well as provide satisfaction. Stebbins (2007) further complicates the picture by introducing the idea of 'serious', 'casual' and 'project-based' leisure, the first incorporating such things as volunteering, or learning a musical instrument, the second such things as dining out, and visits to friends, and the third being the type of intense but short-lived leisure mainly associated with one-off events such as birthdays and festivals. Stebbins and others who work within what is known as the 'serious leisure perspective' see these various types of leisure as having differing core activities, which require differing levels of commitment and intensity and potentially bring about different psychological outcomes. Stebbins' own definition of leisure dispenses with the concept of leisure as *chosen* activity, as he finds the notion of choice to be unrealistic given the constraints faced by many people in their freedom to pursue certain activities; he prefers the following definition,

'...uncoerced activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both), use their abilities and resources to succeed at this. 'Free time' is time away from unpleasant obligation, with pleasant obligation being treated here as essentially leisure...' (2006 p6)

Stebbins does not argue for the superiority of one type of leisure over another but rather sees the different types as being complementary, meeting a range of human needs and he is also clear that leisure commitments may bring costs as well as rewards.

The question arises as to how far it is valid to draw on the leisure related literature in relation to gardening. For some people gardening might arguably be seen as 'obligated time', something akin to housework, which would not be considered as leisure by many people, and in relation to the 'experiential' definitions gardening might not always fit the bill either, as for many people gardening is an activity undertaken without intrinsic satisfaction or pleasure. I would argue however that despite these uncertainties, it is valid for me to draw on the literature since my research specifically explores gardening in relation to people who are *keen* gardeners and I would argue that these people are unlikely to see gardening, as a chore, as being obligated time; for them gardening is likely done by choice, for its intrinsic satisfaction. It is probable that in respect to these particular gardeners the leisure research will have relevance. Having said this, the literature may at times seem quite remote from the subject of gardening as seldom is leisure differentiated, beyond some basic dichotomies - active/ passive, indoor/ outdoor, casual/ serious – but it seems important to spend some time looking at it as the research explores some key processes which have been linked specifically to gardening and so may be very relevant. Researchers who have looked at gardening in everyday life seldom attempt to integrate the leisure research with their own work, but there are certainly many overlapping findings which suggest that the gardening research supports and strengthens the general claims made in the leisure research, but in relation to a specific form of leisure activity. So what, then, does the research have to inform us about the domain of leisure and the experiences that occur during leisure time?

There is now a considerable body of research which highlights the associations between leisure, stress, coping and health; research which often integrates the social psychological literature on coping with the leisure literature on stress and coping (Zuzanek and Mannell, 2000, Iwasaki and Zuzanek, 2001, Haworth and Lewis, 2005, Iwasaki et al., 2005b, Iwasaki et al., 2005c). Caldwell (2005) identifies three classes of research: 'prevention of, coping with, and transcending negative life events' and argues that it is in these ways that leisure has come to be seen as therapeutic.

In early seminal studies, Coleman (1993) and Coleman and Iso-Ahola (1993) hypothesised that leisure might provide a buffering effect against stress, i.e. help people resist the impact of stress, particularly stress at higher levels, with social support and self-determination being the two key mediating factors. Their research generated considerable interest and a number of later studies have explored these ideas further and provided some support for the hypothesis but with refinements and qualifications. Iwasaki and Smale (1998) found, for example, that it was important to look beyond the conventional stress-buffer perspective 'in which events are often dichotomised into either stressful or non-stressful conditions and health is often conceptualised simply as the absence of illness' (p46). They suggested that it was important to take a more considered view of the precise conditions under which leisure buffered against stressful life events. In a longitudinal study they found gender differences in the relationship between leisure and psychological well-being; for example retired women placed greater value on the goal of socialising in their leisure time, without increasing overall participation in leisure, whilst on retirement men increased leisure participation, without any increased value being placed on socialising. On widowhood, men placed greater emphasis than women on the goal of pleasure and fun in leisure activity and as a consequence appeared to reduce their negative psychological well-being, whilst women decreased their leisure socialising and had increased negative psychological well-being.

Iwasaki and Mannell (2000) argue that it is important to look beyond the dimensions of social support and self-determination disposition described by Coleman and Iso-Ahola, and to consider other dimensions to leisure activity

which may help in the management of stress. In their concept of 'hierarchical dimensions of leisure-stress coping', they identify different levels of leisure stress-coping. At the first most generalised level they make an important distinction between leisure coping beliefs and leisure coping strategies, both of which may play a role in helping people cope with stress. By coping beliefs they are referring to people's generalised beliefs that their leisure will help them cope; beliefs which they argue develop over time, are enduring, and maintained through a socialisation process, becoming relatively stable psychological dispositions. In line with Coleman and Iso-Ahola's (1993) view they see these coping belief dispositions as playing a buffering role, or 'moderator against stress to maintain good health'. In contrast they argue that leisure coping strategies play a direct role in the management of stress, 'actual stress-coping situation-grounded behaviours or cognitions', with people sometimes choosing a particular leisure activity specifically to bring about behaviour or cognitions that help them cope with stress (Iwasaki and Mannell, 2000 p167). In other cases stress management is an outcome of leisure involvement which was initially undertaken for an alternative purpose. Leisure coping strategies are seen as being situation specific and Iwasaki and Mannell give the example of a demanding work regime calling for a leisure coping response which involves escape and relaxation whereas negative mood, following, for example, a verbal disagreement with someone, may require a coping response which promotes mood enhancement. These leisure coping strategies are seen in terms of dynamic process, as mediating rather than moderating, the effects of stress on health. In later work Iwasaki found that it was essential for individuals to develop enduring beliefs about the role of leisure in coping, in order to be able to use leisure as a strategy in the actual management of stress (Iwasaki, 2003a).

At the second level of their hierarchy Iwasaki and Mannell identify *leisure friendship* and *leisure autonomy* as sub-dimensions of coping beliefs and *leisure companionship*, *leisure palliative coping*, and *leisure mood enhancement* as sub-dimensions of coping strategies (2000 p168). With respect to *leisure friendship and leisure autonomy* they see people as having a further, third, level of specific beliefs – that friendship will, for example, provide support for self esteem, information needs, emotional support, and tangible aid. In relation to

leisure autonomy they identify two further sub-dimensions of belief: *self-determination* and *empowerment*.

Building on the work of Iwasaki and Mannell, Kleiber and colleagues (Kleiber et al., 2002) propose four functions of leisure in transcending negative life events. The first three functions they identified were: leisure as *distraction*, leisure as a way of *generating optimism about the future*, and leisure as an aid to the *reconstruction of a life story that is continuous with the past*. In relation to leisure as distraction they suggest that leisure participation can create an escape, through creating a distance between an individual and the stressors of negative life events which can in turn lead to increased positive mood. They cite work by Lazarus (1980) on the importance of positively-toned emotions as ‘breathers from stress’. This function of leisure is similar to Iwasaki and Mannell’s dimension of leisure palliative coping, referred to above. It is important to note that Kleiber et al drew no distinction between what might be termed positive and negative leisure with respect to distraction – recreational drug-taking and drinking alcohol could, they argue, be equally as distracting as more positively viewed examples of leisure activity. Their second function, *generating optimism about the future*, was closely linked to their first. Distraction and escape through leisure are seen as providing the space in which hope and optimism can grow, ‘enjoyable experiences that require little risk are often encouraging; a brighter future with new opportunities is more readily imagined.’ the suggestion being that as well as emotional uplift there is also cognitive re-appraisal of the person’s situation (p227). The third function, *reconstruction of a life story that is continuous with the past*, is associated with adjustment to a negative life event and in particular to those aspects of the event which disrupt the sense of self, and break the person’s narrative understanding of their own identity. Leisure is seen as aiding the person’s attempts to reconstruct the story, and Kleiber and colleagues give several examples of how this may happen – for example renewing old pastimes following a negative event, may provide a sense of normality and continuity, re-affirm a person’s sense of what they value, and at the same time put people in contact with other like-minded people, who are able to reinforce the narrative. Kleiber warns against seeing this as an easy or straightforward process. – often a life event will not allow for the resumption of

all previous pastimes and friendships and new ones may have to be sought but these may only ameliorate, or compensate in part, for the disruption to the old life. An important aspect of their work is that it embraces the idea of leisure as leading to long-term effects as well as supporting episodes of coping in the short term.

The fourth function of leisure proposed by Kleiber et al. is arguably their most distinctive contribution to the debate. They argue that leisure does not simply function as a buffer or a coping strategy but can also act as a vehicle for personal transformation in the wake of negative life events, something which is not taken account of in much of the leisure coping literature,

'if people are intentional beings, capable of authoring a life story, influenced though it might be by circumstances, then a disruption allows for a "re-write" of the story rather than simply requiring a mending of it' (2002 p229)

They cite a study by Hutchinson (1996) of people following traumatic brain injury which showed how a 'dramatic reorientation' to the possibilities afforded by leisure can bring new direction and new efforts in the face of overwhelming change and loss which can prove transformative.

Another focus of the leisure stress-coping literature has been on which types of leisure are perceived to produce the most positive outcomes. Caltabiano (1994) identified three particular types - outdoor-active sport, social, and cultural-hobbies leisure - which were most associated with stress reduction. In a later paper Caltabiano (1995) argued that social support was important only in certain circumstances - when stress levels are very high then too much social support can be detrimental. Structured activities, rather than leisure activities per se, have been found to be predictors of adolescent mental well-being (Trainor et al., 2010). Joudrey and Wallace (2009) found that leisure activity which was active and social was most effective in lowering job related stress and related depression amongst the sample of lawyers that they studied. More recent work on leisure and coping has begun to focus on which people are able to derive most benefit from leisure coping. Iwasaki and colleagues (Iwasaki et al., 2006) have explored this question in relation to people's gender, age, and

social class, and found that stress buffering effects of leisure were most apparent for people from lower social classes. The most plausible reason for this finding seems to relate to the sense of empowerment and personal control that leisure activities can engender and Iwasaki argues that leisure may, for this reason, be of greater importance for coping with stress for people from marginalized groups, who for a myriad of structural reasons, suffer least control over their lives.

Caldwell (2005) in her review of leisure research, draws much of this thinking together. She focuses not on whether leisure is therapeutic but on under what circumstances and why it might be so. Referring to a wide range of leisure research, including many of the studies detailed above, she concludes that leisure can be considered a general protective factor that contributes towards resiliency in the balancing act between risk factors and protective factors in people's lives. She identifies seven elements of leisure activity which are protective: being personally meaningful and/or intrinsically interesting; providing opportunities for social support, friendships, and social acceptance; promoting competence and self-efficacy; offering experiences of challenge and total absorption; being self-determined and in control; providing opportunities for feeling relaxed, disengaged from stress, being distracted from negative life event, and ability of leisure to provide continuity in life after, for example, experiencing disability (2005 p17).

Caldwell, along with many other leisure scientists, makes reference to the importance of the concept of flow as developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychologist, who has spent many years studying people when they are intensely engaged in activity; these activities have included painting, writing, playing sport, music, rock climbing, (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). Flow is described as a state of being totally immersed in an activity, the emotions contained, focused and energized. The state is associated with a number of conditions; there are clear goals with an optimal balance between available skills and level of challenge, feedback is immediate, concentration is so total that consciousness of other issues fades, as Csikszentmihalyi puts it, there is a merging of 'activity and awareness' (1988

p32). Outcomes of a flow experience are: feelings of being in control, distortions in the sense of time – time passes quickly but the task itself seems to go on in slowed down time; there is a loss of the consciousness of self, with consequent freedom from worries about failure, and a general inability to focus on thoughts outside the task in hand. The flow experience becomes rewarding in itself, that is, the activity is intrinsically rewarding regardless of the goal attained and flow experiences tend to be repeated for their intrinsic enjoyment.

Moving away from the leisure coping literature other authors have found other functions of leisure activity. Recent work (Pressman et al., 2009) has linked involvement in enjoyable leisure activity not only with improved psychological functioning but also with improved physiological functioning. Higher rates of involvement were associated with lower blood pressure, total cortisol, waist circumference, and body mass index, and perceptions of better physical function even after adjusting for the standard demographic variables. Heintzman and Mannell (2003) suggest that people's spirituality and spiritual well-being may be enhanced through leisure activity, particularly in relation to dealing with time-pressures. Heintzman (2010) explores nature related leisure, in particular, and suggests a complex theoretical model that explains the relationship between nature-based recreation and spirituality. He posits a multifaceted transactional relationship which takes account of *antecedent conditions*, such as personal history, current circumstances, attitude, motivation, socio-demographic characteristics, and spiritual tradition, *setting components*, such as being in nature, being away to a different environment, and place processes, and *recreation components*, for example, activity, free time, solitude, group experiences, and facilitation.. He argues that there will be differences in type of spiritual outcome reflecting the different ways in which the elements making up these components combine, and more research is needed to understand the complexities of the relationships.

The evidence from leisure research points to some strong positive associations between involvement in leisure and healthy outcomes. Leisure is seen to impact on health through its role in relation to stress and coping, and works in two key ways - through promoting resilience to stress through its moderating or

buffering role and more directly by mediating stress in specific situations. Some work has suggested that leisure can lead to transcendence of negative life events and personal growth in certain circumstances. Both leisure-related coping beliefs and leisure related coping strategies are important. Leisure has also been linked to spiritual growth.

The literature in this area is not however without its weaknesses and limitations. Leisure is sometimes very loosely defined within the research and within some studies almost any activity that is not paid work, seems to be counted as leisure time. This loose conceptualisation does not lend itself to a nuanced or practically useful understanding of which aspects of leisure may be producing benefits. Little consideration seems to be given to the possible negative impact of leisure and this may be considerable (Shinew and Parry, 2005). For example, almost no attention is paid to the ways in which there may be pressures within the domain of leisure to achieve certain lifestyle goals, nor is there any focus on negative outcomes, such as recreational drug use leading to dependency or other negative health effects. These omissions can leave the impression that leisure is inherently health giving. Insufficient consideration is paid to the idea that it might be those individuals who are already healthy - psychologically, socially and physically - who engage most readily in leisure pursuits. The majority of studies are cross sectional in design so tell us little about the long term impact of leisure on coping, or about the way that uses of leisure change across lives, or its different impact at different ages and stages (Carpenter and Robertson, 2000, Cassidy, 2005). Samples are often taken from the dominant culture (Iwasaki et al., 2005a) with little attention to contextual factors (Haworth and Lewis, 2005).

The literature concerned with leisure and coping has provided me with a launch pad for thinking more broadly about coping mechanisms and how these are theorised within another body of work, that of bereavement research and I will draw on that particular literature more fully in the discussion of findings. Much of the leisure related work is rooted in psychological coping research and seldom touches on issues of meaning and I am going to turn now to look at writing which does address meaning and specifically meaning in relation to gardening.

Gardens and gardening as opportunities for personal expression and meaning making: Why do people garden?

Cooper (2006 p4) grapples with this question and acknowledges the complexities involved in trying to answer it, 'certainly it is a question that both ramifies into further questions and connects up with still broader ones'. The difficulty in grasping it is, perhaps, further encapsulated in the title of Chris and Zane Maser's book 'The World is in my garden' (Maser and Maser, 2003). The garden is a place of variety and complexity; even, as the Masers argue, a microcosm of the world, a place where the gardener confronts all the issues of the world, in miniature, and why, therefore, trying to tie down the question of why people garden, is never going to be an easy task. The chapter headings in books on the social history of gardening might give us a further hint of the breadth of the question whilst, at the same time, beginning to tie down some of the answers. Jane Brown's (1999) history of gardening 'The Pursuit of Paradise', for instance, has chapters entitled 'The Purest of Human Pleasures', 'The Secret Garden', 'The Military garden', 'Acquiring Eden', 'Labour of Love', 'The Formative Garden', as well as chapters exploring whether gardening is art and questioning where and how science fits into the picture. In these titles some of what might be referred to as the meanings of gardens, and gardening, begin to emerge. Despite the complexities involved a growing number of researchers have taken on the task of trying to find out the meanings ordinary gardeners attribute to their experiences and it is to these that I now turn.

Francis (1990 p206) drawing on interviews carried out with 51 gardeners in California and Norway (Francis and Hill 1989), argues that 'gardens exist very much inside people, in their minds and hearts' and goes on to suggest that these places have unique qualities 'that differ in form and meaning from what is commonly described by garden design theory, horticultural records, or historic surveys'. He identifies a whole range of personal meanings: a place to be; a place to care for growing things; a place to control; a place to exert creativity; a place that reflects personality; a place of freedom; a place for productive work; a place to own; a place that develops over time; and a place of retreat. Taking these meanings together Francis suggests that for many people their garden is

‘personal expression’, and that through its creation people are able to express their personal values,

‘Through our gardens we reveal to ourselves and others our own sense of our status, personality, aesthetics, environmental values, and social ideology’ (1990 p206)

Gross and Lane (2007) studied accounts of the experiences and meanings of domestic gardening across the lifespan. Taking a grounded analytical approach they explored semi-structured interviews which they had conducted with eighteen people aged 18-85 years and identified three emergent themes which, as might be expected, echo some of Francis’s themes. The themes were: *escapism, identity and ownership, and relationships*, which were significant for participants across the lifespan. In terms of escapism they found that gardens offered distraction and escape from the anxieties of everyday life, but that the form this took, varied across the lifespan. In childhood this was apparent as escape in locational and physical terms, but in later life was increasingly experienced in terms of mental escape and release.

In relation to their second theme of ownership Gross and Lane highlight how ownership of a home can promote strong feelings of place attachment with the garden identified as an extension of the home. They identify a range of positive consequences arising from garden ownership - satisfaction, comfort, privacy, pride, status, and creativity - but also recognise that home ownership did not automatically bring strong attachment to a garden and for some people the consequences just mentioned flowed at certain times of life but not at others, whilst for others they did not flow at all. Identity development and maintenance is seen by Gross and Lane as closely tied into people’s ownership of their gardens, ‘For adult home owners of all ages, their gardens were a means of displaying identity, which included their work to produce them.’ Gardens were seen by some of their participants as blank canvases on which they could develop their own creation to achieve ‘their’ garden, full of personal meaning, and embodying ‘the individual’s existing interests, passions, preferences and characteristics, signifying identity...’ (2007 p236).

Their third theme is 'relationships' and by this they mean both relationships between the gardeners and nature and between the gardeners and other people, but they give precedence to the relationship with nature, 'the garden is a place where a relationship with nature can flourish and thus much of the significance of gardens is represented by this opportunity they afford...'. Gross and Lane comment on the intensity of this relationship for some people and see this intensity as providing the motivator 'for the more tedious aspects of the labour of gardening' (p237). Reciprocity within the human-nature relationship is noted as an important factor by the adult gardeners interviewed by Gross and Lane and noted as one that brings feelings of fulfilment. Looking at relationships between people in the garden Gross and Lane emphasise the importance of the social element of the garden and most especially highlight childhood memories of the garden as a social place – as mentioned before they noted how adults referring to their childhood memories usually talked in the plural 'we' rather than 'I'. They found that the contents and structure of the garden could be strongly associated with memorialising and commemoration of past relationships and earlier times.

Gross and Lane's work is one of the very few studies that both considers everyday experiences of gardening and takes a life span approach. They see meanings not in static terms but as evolving across lives and as a result they draw a more discriminating picture of the meanings of gardens. However in putting the stress on just three themes they do, on occasion, seem to shoehorn everything into those themes regardless of other potential interpretations. In particular their stress on ownership, which they do not define in precise terms, sometimes feels rather forced. Meanings of gardens that they link very directly to ownership could potentially be found amongst gardeners who do not in any sense *own* their patch and the precise role of ownership perhaps needs to be teased out more critically.

Bhatti and Church (2001, , 2004) explore the role of the garden not in the context of ownership but rather in the context of the meaning of home and consider the connections to nature, changing notions of environmental risk and social uncertainty in late modernity. They frame their study with a discussion of

the theoretical discourse concerned with the 'risk society', put forward by authors such as Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991),

'The theoretical commonalities of these authors include an emphasis on the increasing importance of individual responses as people faced by globalisation, social and environmental risk, are forced into a more reflexive mode of daily living' (Bhatti and Church, 2004 p42)

They draw on primary research carried out with garden owners in the UK. Their survey showed that 'privacy', 'getting away from it all', 'makes a house a home' and 'a place to relax' emerged as the most important personal meanings that people attributed to their gardens. These garden meanings were contextualised by the fact that the garden was seen as a part of the home as a whole (though having its own distinct character) and played a role in contributing to the home-making project. Whilst the survey data showed that only a minority of people saw learning about nature and environmental care as the most important meanings of their garden, the supplementary qualitative data suggested that for some people highly valued connections to nature were being created in the garden, 'these involved drawing on all the senses along with plants, pets, wildlife, the seasons, the elements, the landscape, and the skyline' (Bhatti and Church, 2004 p 49).

Bhatti and Church argue for a circumspect and nuanced approach to thinking about garden meanings and their importance in people's lives; whilst acknowledging that, for many, the garden was 'a site for human creativity and sensual connections to nature', they go on to say 'it is also imbued with the tensions, ambiguities and contradictions of late modern living' (2004 p49). Privacy emerged as an important meaning for many in their work, and the garden was seen as a place to hide, but Bhatti and Church found differing examples of what people were hiding from. These included the fast changing world, family members, and domestic drudgery, which they suggest can be interpreted as undesirable elements of a 'risk society' but there was no simple link between people's attachments to their garden and concerns about environmental degradation. They found that privacy was compromised by relationships with neighbours, 'in the garden the tensions related to socialising

are also acted out as individuals value and negotiate their neighbours.’ (2004 p46) Bhatti and Church found that the act of gardening itself was full of conflicting emotion, with the emotional and functional gains being compromised by the need for ‘work’, which, for some, was not a pleasing or rewarding experience in itself and therefore unlikely in the authors’ opinion to lead to a completely restorative experience. It could be however that Gross and Lane’s observation is pertinent here, and it is the intensity of people’s relationship with nature which is acting as a motivator that gets them through the tedium of the unrewarding ‘work’ elements of gardening, and enables it to be experienced as restorative. Despite these qualifications the authors considered that the garden offered ‘a distinct site for negotiating and addressing some of the paradoxes of home and domestic life in late modernity.’ (Bhatti and Church, 2004 p49)

Grampp (1990) draws out rather different types of meanings as he concentrates his research more exclusively on the social meanings of gardens, in his case, specifically on Californian gardens. As a student of landscape architect, he interviewed gardeners and he developed a classification of three types of gardens representing three different categories of social meaning. He acknowledged that many other classifications were possible, but these were the ‘responses to a particular set of cultural and environmental conditions’ (p183). His first category is the ‘Californian living garden’ – ‘a household extension, an outdoor (backyard) room suited for domestic activity rather than the requirements of plants.’ Such gardens he found were, like the home of which they were a part, typically managed by women and were set up with walls of vegetation to shield off the domestic activities from external observation. These gardens were the settings for children’s play, entertaining, outdoor eating, and relaxing. The second category of garden is what he terms ‘the well tempered garden’, ‘...formal, ordered, neat and aggressively public...every inch has been attended to by the owner, forged into an undeniably human creation. Absent are any elements of naturalism’ (p182). Simultaneously promoting personal esteem and the neighbourhood image Grampp sees these gardens as being less about the domestic or leisure, and he finds they are gardened equally by men and women. The third type of garden Grampp categorises is the ‘expressionist

garden', hard to typify because they reflect the owners desires not to be tied down to convention standardisation or tradition. Unlike the gardeners in the previous two categories, these gardeners were oriented towards nature and cultivation, with intense involvement in the designing and growing. Personal meanings, such as memories, escape, and relationships, are closely tied in with the choices made for the garden.

Francis and Hester (1990 p10) suggest that 'Meaning resides in the power of the garden to express, clarify, and reconcile oppositions and transform them into inspirations.' They go on to say that the exact nature of the oppositions will depend on the time when the garden is being created but identify six oppositions critical, today, which the garden 'transforms into muses' and these six are: faith, power, ordering, cultural expression, personal expression, and healing. Francis and Hester use these six 'muses' to structure their book on garden meanings. In her contribution to their chapter on faith, Stein (1990) for example, speculates on the story of the creation in Genesis, as written in the original Hebrew and distinguishes a number of elements of faith which embrace oppositional ideas. One of the oppositions identified by Stein is the way in which the garden, as an aesthetic experience, is described using the word 'nechmad' which carries the meaning of lovely or endearing but which is also the word used in the Ten Commandments to mean 'covet'. Another is the way the garden is described in Hebrew using both the masculine (gan) and feminine (ginah) words for garden so giving the garden both male and female attributes. Stein remarks on the constancy of these meanings across time, 'One can but wonder at the longevity of the meanings humans have attached to their creation of the captured landscape – the garden' (Stein, 1990 p38)

Despite this assertion, such descriptions of garden meanings can be seen as far removed from the ways in which ordinary people talk about the meanings their gardens hold for them. The question then arises as to whether meanings, such as those described by Stein, are completely different entities or whether people simply do not have the words to express meanings in the way Stein does, though they are nevertheless embodied in their experiences of gardens.

Cooper (2006 p108-9) argues for the need to distinguish the different ways in which gardens and gardening practices, can be said to hold meaning, and suggests that this is important 'since unless distinctions are made, some confusions and bouts of shadow-boxing which are evident in garden literature will persist.' Here he is referring to authors (he cites Strong 2000 and Hunt 1998) who appear to see meaning as lying in one distinct mode, such as the 'intention to communicate a thought or idea' (Strong) or as 'something like representation' (Hunt). Cooper suggests that meaning can be seen in more varied ways and describes seven commonly encountered modes of garden meaning: *mereological (being a part of something), instrumental, depictive, allusive, expressive, symptomatic and associative* (Cooper, 2006 p114-20). He acknowledges that his classification is not necessarily a complete one and indeed he later goes on to extend it himself. Nor are the modes of meaning necessarily distinct and garden items or practices can simultaneously have multiple modes of meaning attributed to them. Cooper skims swiftly over the first two modes of meaning as relatively unimportant – a garden feature or plant could have 'mereological meaning' in the sense that it contributes something, say an atmosphere, to the whole garden, and a garden practice could have 'instrumental meaning', and here he gives the example of the strange movements of gardeners measuring for a new espalier, having instrumental meaning when seen as a means to a specific end. He spends more time on the next two modes of meaning – 'deictive' and 'allusive' – seeing these as aspects of a wider mode, that of representational meaning, a term that Cooper suggests is often seen by garden writers as synonymous with 'meaning' itself. By 'deictive' he is referring to the representation by the garden, or an aspect of it, of something that could be sensed by us in real terms (if it in fact existed) – so the garden might depict the Garden of Eden, or the rivers of life. 'Allusive meaning' refers to representations that are not so amenable to our senses – that which cannot be directly depicted – and Cooper gives the example of First World War commemorative gardens which can be interpreted as alluding to such conditions as honour and fate; he sees this type of meaning as being akin to metaphorical meaning. Cooper then refers to the ways in which the garden, or gardening practices may be said to allude to emotional or affective states, such as melancholy or joie de vivre, and describes this as 'expressive meaning' - that

is, that the garden is an appropriate product of, or inspiration for, such feelings. The next mode of meaning, 'symptomatic meaning', is seen by Cooper as the pre-occupation of historians and sociologists of gardens. By symptomatic he is referring to the way in which gardens, or gardening styles, may be said to be a symptom or sign of something else with which they are connected, often causally; examples are given of the 18th Century 'English Garden' said to be symptomatic of a patriotic, anti-continental love of liberty, or, perhaps more relevant today, some people seeing garden decking as a 'symptom of affluence and chic'. Cooper highlights the social and cultural aspects of symptomatic meaning and draws a distinction between those and the more personal and individual aspects of 'associative meaning' where gardens hold personal meaning for someone, for example, as places and sites of memories and nostalgia.

Cooper then extends his classification of modes of meaning by broadening his focus, from meanings which might be attached to individual gardens, to a consideration of the meaning of 'The Garden' – he likens this use of the term to the role of the words 'the clarinet' when a child asks 'what does the clarinet sounds like?' – as he puts it, the question becomes one of exemplary gardens, 'is there a mode of meaning, so far missing from our catalogue, that all exemplary gardens have, irrespective of the differences amongst their 'depictive', 'allusive' or whatever meanings?' (2006 p125). In relation to 'The Garden' the mode of meaning is 'exemplification' to which term Cooper adds the concepts of 'bodying forth', and 'epiphany'. Cooper puts forward two proposals for the properties which 'The Garden' exemplifies or 'bodies forth'. In his first 'modest' proposal he suggests that 'The Garden' embodies co-dependence of human creativity and nature, 'the unity between human beings and the natural world, an intimate co-dependence.' In exemplifying this co-dependence he suggests that 'The Garden' is an epiphany of something further – he acknowledges that the modest proposal was too modest - and this leads to his second 'further' proposal that 'The Garden', 'is an epiphany of man's relationship to mystery. This relationship is its meaning.' (p145) Cooper is suggesting here that 'The Garden' is an exemplar of a co-dependency between

the gardener, nature and 'the deep ground of the world'. He sees Cezanne's discussion of his art as helpful for promoting understanding of this idea,

'What I am trying to convey through art', he adds, 'is more mysterious' than the natural world and our relationship to it: 'it is bound up with the very roots of being, the intangible source of sensation' (2006 p143).

Cooper argues not for a theistic reading of the epiphany, though this is the meaning it has for many, but rather for an epiphany that can be open to anyone, regardless of their doctrinal beliefs. He acknowledges not everyone will have the words to describe this epiphany, but argues that it is in this epiphany that 'the meaning of 'The Garden', its deep significance for people, is located.' Cooper acknowledges that this meaning must be something available to people, something they can recognize, or it is rendered meaningless, but if ordinary gardeners find it difficult to find the words to express this meaning, it is, he believes, unlikely that he will find backing for his claim in empirical research, and so he looks to hyper-exemplary gardens and to the works of poets and other writers, 'who are in the business as it were of trying to articulate what 'The Garden' might embody' (2006 p132)

Some authors have explored the garden as a symbol or metaphor but have ultimately expressed very similar ideas to Cooper. Clare Cooper Marcus (1990) describes the Garden of Eden and the oasis of Shambhala as,

'... places that lie partially and perhaps exclusively beyond physical reality as we know it. They are conceptual bridges or symbols by which the human mind finds a link between so-called reality and something intangibly behind it....We garden because that activity requires knowledge and intuition, science and nurturance, planning and faith. We create gardens because at some discernible level of consciousness, it is one way to re-connect with that mythical Garden of Eden or oasis of Shambhala.' (1990 p27)

Robert Pogue Harrison (2008a), a scholar of literature, argues along slightly different lines but again draws on gardens both mythical and real to make his point, 'Gardens, like art, invite us to take the time to learn how to see them; they offer an education in ways of seeing.' (Harrison, 2008b) He sees Eden and other gardens of paradise not as representing something we should be striving

towards, but something we should be striving to get away from; and he suggests that it is timely to revisit the myth and learn its lessons afresh. Eden teaches us, he says, about the human condition and particularly the need for care – paradise gardens represent worlds where man can be quite literally *careless* – everything is provided in perpetuity, nothing is at stake,

‘If he had wanted to make Adam and Eve keepers of the garden, God should have created them as caretakers; instead he created them as beneficiaries, deprived of the commitment that drives a gardener to keep his or her garden.’ (Harrison, 2008a p8)

Harrison argues that only after the fall, was Adam capable of human development,

*‘In Eden, Adam was unburdened by worries but incapable of devotion. Everything was there for **him** (including his wife). After his exile, **he** was there for all things, for it was only by dedicating himself that he could render humanely inhabitable an environment that did not exist for his pleasure and that exacted from him his daily labor’ (Harrison, 2008a p8)*

Again, it might be said that Harrison’s interpretations have taken us a very long way from the world of everyday gardens, but he goes on to explore more concretely the ways in which the gardener is ‘an Adam who has re-engaged with the element of which he is made’ (2008a p29). He draws extensively on the work of Czech author, Karel Capek, whose 1929 work ‘The Gardener’s Year’ is ‘a book about the gardener’s love affair with the earth’. Harrison suggests that this love affair begins with the private plot but from there it ‘extends outward to the earth as a whole’ (2008a p30), and he argues that gardening brings about changing perceptions - ‘a phenomenological conversion’,

‘Gardening is an opening of worlds – of worlds within worlds - beginning with the world that is at one’s feet. To become conscious of what one is treading on requires that one delve into the ground’s organic underworld, so as to appreciate, in an engaged way, the soils’ potential for fostering life.’ (Harrison, 2008a p31)

Harrison and Capek identify an underlying basic ethical principle that gardeners come to embrace, which is, that for life to exist, ‘you must give more to the soil

than you take away' (Capek cited Harrison 2008a p33). From this principle flows an understanding that this is as true of human culture as it is of the earth,

'What holds true for the soil – that you must give it more than you take away- holds true for nations, institutions, marriage, friendship, education, in short for human culture as a whole, which comes into being and maintains itself in time only as long as its cultivators overgive of themselves' (Harrison, 2008a p33)

Harrison sees the garden in powerful terms, believing that, alongside the plants, human beings can also flourish in the garden, and by so flourishing, can resist some of the negative forces that have pervaded history,

'The gardens that have graced this mortal Eden of ours are the best evidence of humanity's reason for being on Earth. Where history unleashes its destructive and annihilating forces, we must, if we are to preserve our sanity, to say nothing of our humanity, work against and in spite of them. We must seek out healing, or redemptive forces and allow them to grow in us. That is what it means to tend our garden.' (Preface to Harrison 2008)

Whilst seeming a long way from everyday experiences of gardening such writing can challenge us to think about gardening in the broadest of terms, and to consider the bigger roles it might play not just for the individual but also for society and across history.

Gardening and pleasure

A concept that *is* part of every day gardening discourse but often absent from academic discussions is that of pleasure and yet this is presumably at the very heart of many people's experience of their gardening and has been described by Francis Bacon as the 'purest of human pleasures' (Bacon and Cowley, 1903). The idea is captured in our language – a 'pleasance' is an obsolete medieval term for a garden existing purely to give pleasure to the senses and we are all aware of the term 'pleasure garden'. Treib has noted this absence in professional design publications,

'...the aspect of pleasure is almost entirely missing from the discourse, whilst it thrives in popular gardening magazines and seed catalogues...a discussion of pleasure is rarely part of trade or academic writing' (Treib, 1995 p58).

Despite general omission, Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), in a large scale survey, did in fact find that sensory pleasures were amongst the most important motivators for gardening; these included scents, sounds, colours and appreciation of beauty. This aspect of gardening is addressed by Bhatti, Church and colleagues (2009) who analyse the garden as a place for ‘enchanted encounters’, which they describe as,

‘...joyful pleasures when time seems to stand still in a specific place. These are sensuous embodied experiences which for a moment reverberate...’, (Bhatti et al., 2009 p61)

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has ranged widely over diverse literature which has relevance for the topic. However, it is apparent that, whilst there is a great deal of literature that is tangentially relevant, there is only a very limited body of work which directly addresses the questions raised in this study about the meaning of gardening in everyday life and its links with health and well-being.

I have explored the literature under five main headings, which relate to the key opportunities afforded by gardening; these are for: contact with nature; physical activity, social interaction; leisure and recreation, and personal expression and meaning making. There are many potential overlaps between the sections, and an important example, is in the theoretical concepts which are drawn on to underpin the research in the different domains. Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1995) in particular has emerged as a key concept, offering an explanation for the important role natural surroundings, including gardens, may play in both people’s subjective experiences and in their coping mechanisms. ART describes the role played by nature in offering respite from attentional fatigue, thereby supporting people’s capacity for directed attention, which is necessary for competent functioning across a range of contexts; ART has been associated with mental, physical and social outcomes, all of which are associated with well-being. Biophilia (Wilson, 1984), defined as a genetically based disposition to be attracted to nature, and its expression in the nine biophilic values identified by Kellert (Kellert and Wilson, 1993) has also emerged as an important concept. Although hypothetical, and largely untested,

the concept of biophilia is compatible with the evidence which has emerged in many studies exploring people's environmental preferences and the links between the natural world and health and well-being.

The opportunities which are associated with gardening bring about a range of outcomes associated with the promotion or the maintenance of health and well-being. Contact with the natural world - even passive contact - has been found associated with such varied areas as improved recovery from stress and anxiety, and more rapid physical post operative recovery (Ulrich, 1984); improved tolerance of pain (Diette et al., 2003); reduced levels of sickness amongst prisoners (Moore, 1981); higher levels of life satisfaction and sense of well-being (Kaplan, 2001); better task performance (Shibata and Suzuki, 2004); enhanced concentration (Tennessen and Cimprich, 1995); better coping with poverty and other life challenges and with reduced levels of aggression and violence (Kuo, 2001, Kuo and Sullivan, 2001).

Regular physical activity, of moderate intensity, has been widely associated with better health, especially cardio-vascular health, and a reduced mortality rate (Andersen et al., 2000). Gardening is often cited as an example of physical activity which can be easily incorporated into daily life, and continued into old age, and as such has been endorsed by policy makers in health promotion (Pate et al., 1995, Haskell et al., 2007).

Enhanced social interaction and social inclusion are widely cited as beneficial outcomes of therapeutic gardening (Sempik et al., 2003) but there is scant research on the social outcomes of everyday gardening. Childhood gardens emerge fairly clearly as important social spaces (Bhatti and Church, 2001, Gross and Lane, 2007). Research with adults, although more limited, suggests a range of social benefits, and these include increased social networks and support, including increased interaction with neighbours and the local community (Dunnett and Qasim, 2000). Gardening has been cited as providing a point of contact for intergenerational communication within families and communities (Freeman et al., 2012). The evidence on social benefits is not entirely straightforward and in particular there are questions over how far individual gardeners are motivated by social outcomes of gardening. Studies of older

people suggest that social outcomes may be less important than other motivators for gardening, such as contact with nature, and physical exercise (Ashton-Shaeffer and Constant, 2005). Gardens are seen as gendered spaces but the literature suggests that they are sites where gender relations can be negotiated, and resisted as well as reproduced (Bhatti and Church, 2000, Parry et al., 2005).

Leisure science has provided some of richest literature in terms of understanding the processes by which gardening might play a role in stress reduction, and coping. Iwasaki and Mannel's (2000) work, in particular, highlights how leisure can play not only a buffering role against stress, but can also have a direct role on stress management, with leisure activities providing varied strategies, such as distraction, and mood enhancement, which can be drawn on selectively according to the origin of the stress. Leisure has been identified as a means by which negative life events can be transcended (Caldwell, 2005) and also as a resource for personal growth (Heintzman, 2010).

The final body of literature reviewed was that concerned with meaning and personal expression, in short, the question of why people gardened. This literature was less unified, with writing from philosophical, sociological and psychological standpoints. Some was evidence based and some was argued from a more hypothetical standpoint, in fact, Cooper (2006) disputes whether the deepest meanings of gardening can be uncovered empirically. Taken together, this literature showed that gardens can hold a multiplicity of meanings, some of which relate to the natural world, some to social relationships, and some to individual identity concerns. Cooper's (2006 p4) assertion that why people garden '...is a question that both ramifies into further questions and connects up with still broader ones' was borne out. Rather than attempt to shape the writing into a cohesive body for the sake of a summary, it seems more important to highlight this diversity, this complexity, and the dynamic nature of the meanings that emerged. This literature sometimes drew heavily on metaphor and on art and on poetry and, in some senses, took us a long way from the everyday and the ordinary. In another sense, by bringing in these non-empirical sources, these authors were really trying to grapple with the complexities and the mysteries inherent to the question of why people garden.

Bhatti and Church (2004), in their paper that considers gardening in the context of late modernity, call for ‘a nuanced and circumspect’ approach to understanding the meaning of gardening and the literature overall suggests that this is a prudent warning. Gardens and gardening, *are* difficult to tie down, and this should not be surprising as Francis and Hester (1990) indicate they embody idea, place and action, and can accept paradox. This complexity can be seen as offering richness and as one of the reasons for their enduring appeal; why gardening exerts a pull on both men and women, rich and poor, and on people from all classes, cultures, and religions.

The literature has been broad, frequently general, to do with nature or leisure, and not always directly related to gardening. It tends to sit within its own disciplinary area, seldom seeking to make cross links. The empirical evidence that does exist is not always of high quality. However, the gardening literature is growing all the time and, increasingly, the claims made intuitively for gardening are being subjected to academic scrutiny. There is still little that takes a life course approach, little that considers everyday gardening, and in particular little that tries to take a holistic view and explore how the varied opportunities that gardening affords might, in synthesis, offer something both specific and far-reaching. These are the particular gaps that this study targets.

Chapter 4

Recollections of Childhood Gardens

‘Sowing the seed’

Overview of analysis chapters

The analysis showed that gardening was not a constant activity across people's lives but rather an activity with peaks and troughs and, across cases there appeared to be a consistent pattern to these fluctuations, which suggests an underlying life course profile of gardening. The four chapters of analysis are organised to reflect this profile with each of them exploring a time of change and considering the factors that shaped the experience of gardening at these particular times in the life course. As far as possible, I present the various themes in the direct words of the participants, drawing on the autobiographical writings where this seems to add depth to the analysis. Appendix V (p300) and Appendix VI (p313) provide summaries and case studies of the gardeners. The findings within each chapter are followed by a discussion which explores the nature of the evidence more fully, linking it to theoretical work.

This first chapter looks primarily at childhood recollections of gardens; the second chapter looks at gardening within adulthood, but concentrates chiefly on the transitional period when people first engage in gardening as an adult, and assume the identity of ‘gardener’. The third chapter focuses on major life events - times when gardening activity was undertaken with particular intensity – and in particular looks at gardening as a coping strategy and resource, and the fourth chapter explores the meanings gardening acquires in retirement and old age, including extreme old age, and considers the impact of declining health on people's relationship to gardens and gardening.

There was one life stage which stood apart from all others and, because it did stand apart, I am going to deal with it first, and fairly briefly, before moving on to the ‘peak’ stages. I am referring to the gardening ‘trough’ of adolescence and early adulthood.

Gardening in adolescence and early adulthood: ‘A period of dormancy’

I acknowledge that I am bringing two quite different life stages together here. I have put them together because in terms of gardening they were very similar. The majority of the people I interviewed turned their back on gardening almost completely throughout their adolescence and the earliest years of adulthood. The exact timings varied; Trish, for example, returned to gardening at a relatively young age and Andrew had only a very brief pause in his interest but even they, both, acknowledged a short spell of indifference. Others turned away in adolescence and did not return to active gardening until they were well into their adult years.

When I say turned away, I am principally talking about turning away from the activity of gardening, rather than from the garden as a place; several people mentioned using the garden for sun-bathing or for exam revision during this period of their lives. Andrew was the one person who very actively gardened right up until he left school, but he felt that there were slightly unusual circumstances. As well as assuming responsibility for the garden in the face of his mother’s health problems, it also provided him with activity in what was otherwise quite a solitary life in a rural setting,

“I didn’t have that typical teenage social life at all for those years which looking back is a bit strange but at the time didn’t feel strange – it was just kind of , I don’t know, old fashioned, isolated rural life or something and so yeah the garden was a big part of my life... I read the books and watched Gardener’s World and sort of just behaved as if I was fifty I suppose [laughs] but was really interested in it.” (Andrew)

For most people, so complete was the turn away from gardening, they had little to say about those years,

*“...as a teenager, it was a nuisance, I lost interest till I got married”
(Rosie)*

“...gardening was really put slightly on the backburner...Yes because I went abroad and I went to America for two years and

things like that and completely went away...and I didn't really think about gardening for a while." (Diana)

Andrew and Trish both emphasised the attraction of new interests that opened up for them and, over time, usurped gardening,

"I didn't really even think about it no! I was at Oxford in Christchurch that has these beautifully mown grassy green lawns and I remember thinking, 'that's dull they should put a few plants in' but other than that didn't do anything about it at all...and that's when I was much more into computers and did a huge amount of student radio and broadcasting and that kind of stuff and loving it."
(Andrew)

"...as an adolescent I didn't do much, because my life went in a different way. I was at a music school, doing all this music stuff, and I guess my spare time was taken up with music, rather than being able to get out" (Trish)

Alex put his emphasis on the aspects he was seeking to leave behind, as well as the practical difficulties in accessing a garden at that stage of his life, something mentioned by several people,

"...and fast forward to when you go through medical school and gardens mean very little and I certainly didn't like going out to National Trust type [gardens] because that was my parent's lifestyle which I was rebelling against and then there were junior doctor years when you are living in rented accommodation so I wasn't interested in gardens..." (Alex)

Like Alex, Mike stressed how alien the whole world of home making, including gardening, was to him at that time,

"I would have laughed hysterically if you even hinted at the idea – the idea of me going into Homebase – I would have laughed because it's such – it's just - you know - it's not what one does." (Mike)

During this period of life, the emphasis was increasingly placed on activities with peers, rather than parents, and on activities which were not home based. Those who had left home seldom had easy access to a garden but, even when they had access, the inclination to garden seemed to be dormant. A few of the people interviewed mentioned enjoying local parks, or other natural places, but no one gardened continually throughout those years. Questions, then, arise as to

whether adolescents and young adults actually perceive gardens differently to younger and older people, whether they are simply attracted to, or distracted by, new activities, or whether they are deliberately or unconsciously rejecting gardening as something too redolent of childhood and, in order to grow up, they feel the need to turn away from childish things. Most of the people interviewed simply described the falling away of interest but, when reasons were offered, they tended to support the latter two explanations, and Pollan sums this up well,

“If gardening is an exploration of a place close to home, being a teenager is an exploration of mobility, and these two approaches to place, or home, are bound sooner or later to come into conflict. For at least a decade I didn’t think once about plants or even notice a landscape.”(Pollan, 1991 p33)

The wider literature does not go far in broadening understanding. There is a dearth of research which focuses specifically on adolescent attitudes to domestic gardening but, that which has considered it, confirms the findings in my study. Gross and Lane (2007), in their phenomenological study of gardening within a life span perspective, highlight adolescence as a time of low interest and surveys from market research support their qualitative findings, confirming that this age-group has the lowest involvement in gardening (Intel, 2004). There are some studies which throw light onto teenage life and by extrapolation help explain why gardens may be low in teenager’s priorities. Matthews et al (1998), who studied young people in a Midlands UK setting, found that teenagers set great store on their newly increased spatial autonomy and as a result of recently won freedom spent increasing time away from home, usually with friends. Their study found that teenagers wanted places out of the gaze of adults, places they where they could develop what Matthews and Colleagues called ‘microcultures’, where they could develop their own patterns of consumption and associated lifestyles – of dress, hair, and music. These microcultures were extremely varied but all confirmed a sense of identity and belonging. ‘Special places’ was another theme to emerge in their research and they, like others (Owens, 1988, Chawla, 1992) found that these were often to be found in natural settings, such as woods, places often used individually, sometimes without parental knowledge or consent, and specifically used to bring respite and comfort at times of stress or difficulty. Korpela and colleagues (2001) found

that young people (12-13 years) did not necessarily name natural settings as their favourite places but found that, whether natural or not, over half of young people used their favourite places for cognitive restoration and relaxation.

The literature is not without its methodological issues and is not straightforward to interpret. Studies have samples with slightly different age profiles which, at a time of rapid emotional and physical change, might make comparisons difficult or irrelevant. Studies are set in varying cultural contexts, with different levels of exposure, or freedom of access, to natural settings; some talk of special places, whilst others look at favourite or preferred places, without questioning what these terms signify and whether domestic gardens qualify as natural settings. Some studies ask about actual behaviour whilst others seek views on photographs of landscape. Whilst it is difficult to say with any certainty that adolescence and young adulthood brings a changed attitude to the natural world, it is possible to see how young people gradually seek to build autonomy, and expand their understanding of themselves, within a wider social context. For many, this involves increased freedom to look outside of the home for new experiences; is a time of increased contact with peers within less structured settings, and time on their own apart from adult scrutiny. Gardens do not appear to meet the particular needs of this age group and so diminish in significance.

Recollections of childhood gardens: ‘Sowing the seed’

The rest of this chapter sets out the findings in relation to recollections of childhood gardens. I explore the nature, as well as the content, of the childhood recollections, and will also discuss the quality of the evidence. I will consider whether childhood experiences may impact on later life attitudes to gardening.

Childhood gardens: Memories were vivid

I found that all of the respondents seemed comfortable starting their story in childhood, and they often felt their interest had begun then,

“Well, I have always been interested in gardening. Even as a little kid I used to have my own little garden and so on.” (Alison)

People's recollections of childhood gardens were striking, particular in relation to the pleasure their garden had given them, and this suggested that, if nothing more, vibrant and positive memories of gardens known in childhood had been carried through into adulthood.

"...ever since I was probably about five or six I have enjoyed being in the garden and that was the start of it and it was quite sort of therapeutic when I was little - I just did enjoy it . It was quite a big garden so it was fun" (Diana)

"...we had a huge garden, which my granddad used to look after it...my granddad he was having every single vegetable, and it was lovely for us, and fruit trees and grapes, and everything you could grow..." (Elena)

The memories were often vivid but they also, at times, seemed rather elusive; only a few were fashioned into genuinely coherent stories; more often the memories served to provide mere glimpses into the child's world,

"... and there was a huge swing which was something my dad had thrown over a tree, that was very, very, tall, and me and my tiny little brother used to do magic swings, which is where you put it on your stomach, and go, kind of, backwards on the swing. That's, I think those are my main memories of that garden" (Ellie)

"I remember having a wigwam, now you mention it. I remember having a wigwam up in the garden, and an Indian head dress." (LAUGHS)... (Barbara)

"The gardener used to sit me in his wheelbarrow and take me around..." (Celia)

These glimpses provided me with a sense of what meanings might be important for the child but I feel it is important to be tentative in my claims. Having said this, certain things were clear.

Memories were positive

First, that the memories were virtually all positive – gardens were places the children wanted to be,

"Well, I just liked being there" (Widdy)

“Grandpa’s realm was outside, where he and his gardener, Andy, had made what I judged a paradise” (Michael Pollan, 1991 p13),

Gardens were consistently remembered as places of sociability, action, and fun,

“Yes, it was a lovely place for children to make dens and things. And I think maybe this [current garden] reminds me a bit of that. Not so much space, but children could really love this. Plenty of space to run and play and do...” (Frances)

“There was me and all my friends, because I was always bringing friends home. There were dogs, there were cats, there were rabbits, there were tortoises. And there was no money. So there were no swings. So we basically ran around in the garden and threw balls at each other.”(Trish)

“Because we were quite boisterous, my brother and I. We were always building things and jumping off things and stuff.” (Andrew)

Memories were sensory

Second, recollections of pleasing sensory experiences were strong,

“He [grandfather] grew geraniums in the greenhouse, and the smell of geraniums reminds me of him. You can see in the carport, I always have geraniums. [LAUGHTER] I like them. They are old fashioned.” (Frances)

Close engagement with materials of garden

The accounts provided a strong sense of the children’s spontaneous engagement with the different elements of the garden; so mud was for mucking around in, and soil was for tunnelling through, trees were for climbing or hiding in, flowers were for picking and smelling, and fruit for eating. There seemed little distance between the children and the materials of the garden,

“It was fun – landscaping and engineering – I spent a lot of time building strange drainage systems and underground watering systems as much as planting stuff and just getting muddy.”(Andrew)

“And there were poppies everywhere, and I was ...excited that they were poppies, and they were kind of up to my shoulders, they were so massive.”(Ellie)

“The garden at Cambridge consisted of the walnut tree and an uneven lawn from whose clippings constructed grass forts, which

rotted until the fermenting grass turned slippery. The garden was bounded by an old brick wall covered with caterpillars of the Large White, basking in the sunlight...” (Derek Jarman, 1992 p15)

Gardens were experienced as places of freedom

Memories were generally of gardens as places of freedom; a freedom, I guess, the children did not experience in the house; there was a sense of the garden being their own space, unencumbered by too many adult demands or restrictions.

“I could go out there and do what ever I wanted...” (Mike)

“My parents’ garden was virtually just turned over entirely to us as children” (Lou)

This brings a set of recollections which pertain to the garden experienced directly, without adult mediation, indeed, Michael Pollan talks about his first garden as, ‘a place no grown-up ever knew about’; his garden was the space between the hedge and the fence,

“In an adult’s picture of this landscape, the hedge runs flush against the fence. To a four-year-old, though, the space made by the vaulting branches of a forsythia is as grand as the inside of a cathedral, and there is room enough for a world between a lilac and a wall.” (Michael Pollan, 1991 p7)

This, then, is the garden as the child’s own world and, for some, that world was one of fantasy; the garden could be something quite unimagined by adults,

“And my garden, aged four to six, was an area of sort of, there was a ruin, and some steps, and I used to be obsessed with sweeping my steps... The steps were called Switzerland. I think one of my nannies had just moved to Switzerland, so I called them Switzerland, and I used to go to Switzerland and sweep my steps.” (Ellie)

Places for escape

It was a place for escape, and this frequently meant privacy and solitude,

“But I have ownership of one corner, where I don’t really - I don’t grow anything - but it’s the corner that looks out into the valley, and it’s just where I’ve always, always, gone, and sat and read and

worked.” (Ellie talking about her parents’ garden known since early childhood)

The value of escape and solitude were particularly emphasised as important by those people whose childhoods were not entirely carefree,

“And I can remember, almost, going into the smaller part of the garden which was probably about 30 yards away from the house which was separated by a kind of a Mexican Arch, which my Dad built, and I think by going into that second space it was a little bit of privacy and escape from the flat... I think I was escaping away from the messiness of the flat rather than welcomingly going into the garden and the garden allowed me to have my own little world that just took me out of a two bedroom flat with 32 cats.” (Mike)

Gardens seemed to offer distraction from troubling situations,

*“At that time, yeah my mum was very ill and it was quite a stressful time and I think, post rationalising, but rather than be in the cut and thrust of a competitive ball game it was much more relaxing to be just pottering around on this garden watching things grow and just sort of tending it, making it look nice – it was something I could – I suppose – I really am analysing it now! I was in control of it, it was **my** area and I was in control of it.” (Andrew)*

“And Granny’s garden was lovely....it had a greengage tree which I used to climb, and read a book in it. Being an only child I was a bit lonely....But yes, I miss Granny’s garden” (Celia aged 87)

In the last quote Celia seems to be indicating not just the enjoyment of a green and pleasant *space*, but specifically, enjoyment of a particular *place* and one for which she felt nostalgia. The following account of her childhood perhaps indicates why the recollection of her grandmother’s garden could evoke such a strong emotional ‘tug’, even though she was now in her 88th year,

“I was plunged straight into boarding school from India and I had a terrible time. I was very badly teased and verbally abused all the time. I had no idea that would happen. But my parents weren’t happy together and my mother didn’t really like children. I am sure I was a mistake. But the fact was, I was there. And so they plunged me into boarding school and my father went to Nigeria and eventually back to India again. I went back and forth to India three times, I think, in the eight years. But my granny lived in Suffolk and she had a lovely garden, full of dahlias” (Celia)

Celia's emotional connection to the garden was very apparent in her account,

"I just felt, with no brothers and sisters, I felt the flowers were my friends." (Celia)

Derek Jarman also described his grandmother's garden as a special place and, in particular, he stressed that the solitude provided by her garden allowed him the opportunity to stand and absorb the life going on around him, something which he did not feel he could share with his friends,

"Flowers spring up and entwine themselves like bindweed along the footpaths of my childhood. Most loved were the blue stars of wild forget-me-knots that shimmered in the dark Edwardian shrubberies of my grandmother's garden...Pristine snowdrops spread out in the welcoming sun – a single crocus..."

These spring flowers are my first memory, startling discoveries; they shimmered briefly before dying, dividing the enchantment into days and months, like the gong that summoned us to lunch, breaking up my solitude.

The gong brought the pressing necessity of that other world into the garden where I was alone. In that precious time I would stand and watch the garden grow, something imperceptible to my friends."
(Jarman, 1992 p7)

Places for control

Andrew, quoted above, refers to the garden as 'my area' and asserts his control of it. The theme of control was discernible in other accounts (especially Gerald's: see excerpt from case study (page 147) but was particularly strong in Andrew's story, recurring several times, and it was not just in relation to his home garden but also the garden at his school,

"...to one side were these strips about half the size of this room - there were about six of them ...a few people took some interest but not a lot, and I eventually got assigned a garden and over about three years took over all of the gardens (laughs) and became head gardener so that was what I did at break times rather than – I was never very good at kicking a football around so me and about four or five of us, with me in charge, sort of sorted out these gardens."
(Andrew)

Control took several forms throughout his account. It could relate to assuming responsibility and taking charge,

*“...and then my mother was ill for several years and during that period I kind of took on the garden and kept it under control.”
(Andrew)*

Or it could be more direct - about dominating the garden and shaping it to his own design,

“Yes, yes I tamed it – it had got quite wild – I removed lots of - some of the old broom bushes, and I built a bank and I neatened up the herbaceous borders and I put in the rows of cat mint...” (Andrew)

Sometimes attempts to control the garden, or natural elements within, led to a new appreciation amongst children of lurking dangers, and an associated sense of excitement and awe,

“...the pond lilies bore a fruit that when roasted was very sweet, and... to harvest the fruit of the lilies in the first place was very dangerous; I believe I can remember people who died (children) trying to reach these pond lilies, but perhaps no such thing happened, perhaps I was only afraid that such a thing would happen...” (Jamaica Kincaid, 2000 p6)

“Miss P. was the terror of all creeping annoyances: chasing slugs with a packet of salt she swiftly dealt out a fizzy saline death, which I watched with horrified fascination. Her green fingered war on the enemies of husbandry was remorseless; a boiling kettle dispatched a conurbation of ants; a pierced jam jar imprisoned a multitude of struggling wasps...” (Jarman, 1992 p35)

The influence of parents and other adult gardeners

Miss P., and her methods of pest control, clearly left an impression on the 10 year old Jarman and opens up another set of garden recollections. I have so far concentrated on recollections which focussed on the gardens as private spheres for children but of course they were also shared places which featured adults other children and pets. In fact, connections with adults, and adult influences, were particularly noteworthy in the majority of the accounts; a high percentage of interviewees identified their parents or grandparents as very keen gardeners.

Seventeen of the twenty-five people interviewed fell into this category and several highlighted the possible significance of this for their own interest,

“I come from a family of gardeners. I learnt gardening from my father. His father was a gardener...it’s probably in the genes”
(Robert)

“OK, well I think gardening has always been important in the family, and I think that is something that will come out when I talk about this garden...” (Deborah)

*“Gardening is **definitely** a big bit of my parents’ life - brought up in a large suburban house with a large suburban garden and all dad ever seemed to do was do the garden – very important for him- and so me and my brother- there were just the two of us – were allocated our two little plot.”* (Alex)

And, in the few cases, where parents and grandparents were not gardeners, interviewees invariably made reference to other adults who had played a key part in their childhood and who were active gardeners,

“...all my uncles had lovely gardens, you know, and vegetable allotments and things like that, so I mean that was the way they did things in the country, they lived on what they grew...Oh yes, we spent every holiday down there.” (Clive).

“We only lived in two rooms, but the lady next door, who adopted me as her grandchild, had a garden, and they were country people....And I was always with them, helping, well, watching them garden. That was my first introduction to gardens....Four years old. Quite small...it was back garden, with a chicken run at the end. And it was a typically country garden, because they’d come from Oxfordshire.” (Widdy aged 94 looking back 90 years)

Sometimes the introduction to gardening came solely from a society or person encountered through school,

“... I lived in a block of flats but in those days we had something called the London Flower Lovers’ League, where we used to grow nasturtiums in the summer and daffodils in the winter, and even then I used to fill our balcony with all different plants.” (Ken)

As well as enjoyment of, and attachment to, the garden space provided by adults, most people’s memories included clear recollections of adults taking an

active, mediating, role. Sometimes this involved direct teaching about the natural world,

“I did get really keen on the roses, the care of the roses. Now, my grandma, my nana, was a really keen gardener, although she ran a pub for years. But when they retired and got a garden, whenever I went up there I would help in her garden, because she had a really colourful garden. Amazing.... she had been the one to show me how to grow runner beans. And what is weeding and what is compost. All the things that are really simple and you take for granted if you are a gardener, but you have to learn them at some point... She taught me how to deal with the roses.” (Trish)

“...so that from a young age – we moved there when I was three – we just spent lots of time in the garden ... my mum would be digging around in the shrubbery and would instruct us [on] various things that she wanted us to do that didn’t require too much skill or strength...Yeah we were given trowels so we had little tools. It would just be a little bit of digging around, weeding a bit. Not a great deal of responsibility.” (Andrew)

Adults seemed adept at identifying gardening jobs that would appeal to children, and giving them the guidance and tools to help them accomplish the tasks,

“Because when I was five my grandmother gave me a plot next to the latrine toilet. And that was my plot and I grew eddoes. And eddoes is like yam, like a tiny one. But it grows this beautiful big leaf, enormous, absolutely enormous...and that leaf, you use as vegetable, like spinach or something like that, and you chop it up and put it into dishes...and that was easy to grow, because you didn’t have to do anything to them, just plant them, water them and let them grow.. And I was aware, like with everything, that you had responsibility to share that food with everyone. It didn’t matter if the plum tree only produced five plums; everybody had to have a taste. So I knew, if I came home one day that the eddoes’ tops were all gone, that we were going to eat it for dinner that night.” (Dionne)

Being part of a bigger family effort was appealing,

“I remember it was mostly for grapes picking, that was the point when we were really involved, it was really nice, a nice activity; you could have the whole family, cousins and uncles and everyone coming one day to my granddad...” (Elena)

Many of the interviewees were very specific in their memories of important gardening role models,

“...and I do remember using the garden obviously to play as children but also, my father in particular being very keen on gardening, and growing up with the idea of first of all helping him, there is a picture somewhere in here of me with a watering can... and then when I got a bit older learning how to propagate.’... (Deborah)

“...there was a music teacher who bought me tomato plants and showed me how to grow those and another teacher – a maths teacher – had an amazing landscaped garden ...a huge great place with streams and bridges ... he would invite a load of us over once a year ... and that was quite inspiring to see this really mature, amazing garden and he showed us around a bit so yes that was inspiring.” (Andrew)

Sometimes the adults took a back seat, simply providing space and resources for the children to discover gardening for themselves. Gardens and gardening provided rich opportunities for children to safely undertake activities which could develop feelings of responsibility and self-efficacy,

“At school I didn’t shine. Failed my eleven plus, but was interested in gardening. So my father gave me a part of the garden to look after.” (Robert)

Self-instigated gardening was sometimes accomplished with an unmistakable sense of personal fulfilment, as well as parental approval, even when the results were less than perfect,

“And I suppose the first sort of voyage into gardening ...I was probably about thirteen, I decided I was going to dig over a patch in the garden and I had read somewhere about rockeries, and I designed a rockery, and planted it up and everything. And my parents were fine, they encouraged me to do it ...looking back on it now, from a design point of view it must have been a typical currant bun type thing, with rocks placed all over it. But considering that...it came out quite well... I got great satisfaction with plants growing and things, and things thriving.” (Lou)

Natural processes themselves sometimes fuelled a developing sense of mastery, tinged with wonder,

“I do remember getting a pine cone and getting seeds out of that, and sowing it, and much to my amazement, all these little pine seeds growing.” (Alison)

This sense of mastery, coupled with wonder, is echoed in Michael Pollan's dramatic account,

*"I am by myself behind the hedge ...just poking around, when I catch sight of a stippled green football sitting in a tangle of vines and broad leaves. It's a watermelon. The feeling is of finding treasure ...then I make the big connection between the watermelon and a seed I planted or at least spit out and buried, months before: **I made this happen.** For a moment I am torn between leaving the melon to ripen and the surging desire to publicize my achievement: **Mom has got to see this.**"[Emphasis in original] (Pollan, 1991 p8-9)*

There is certainly a great sense of enjoyment of active gardening that shines through many accounts,

"Yes, me and my brother and my mum planted potatoes in sort of...what are those things that grow in chimney pots? Radishes. No, not radishes, rhubarb! ... Rhubarb in massive chimney pots, and strawberries and things. And then we used to help dad with the mowing, which was very exciting. But, yeah, it was the only thing we didn't sort of demand to be paid for..." (Ellie)

"And certainly I used to love helping my mum and dad. They used to grow purple sprouting broccoli and runner beans and stuff like that, so, although I had my own little bit I did actually more help." (Alison)

It was fairly clear that most children moved fairly effortlessly between helping and more playful activity,

"...they didn't actively teach me but I used to watch them...and I liked cutting the edges and things like that. And we had quite a lot of fruit and veg and we used to go and help pick. When our friends came round we used to go and eat the strawberries, things like that." (Diana)

Adults as facilitators of children's appreciation of gardens

There were a number of examples of people recalling very early experiences of adults encouraging and facilitating their appreciation,

"... I'd get up at seven o'clock in the morning and go, you know, when the gates were first open, before any...there wasn't another

soul in the park, apart from the park keepers. I got friendly with one of them, and he used to take me around all the park, tell me the names of all the flowers and trees. That's how I got to know the names of all the trees." (Widdy)

This included aesthetic appreciation; Clive in his late eighties spoke specifically about his first admiration of a garden plant, which his mother went on to purchase for him,

"Well, it was when we were down Balham Market, and we saw these lovely petunias. Now, strangely enough that petunia is not grown these days. I don't know why, it grew straight up, it didn't bush out, even if you nipped the top, and the flowers came out alternatively in a great big trumpet, purple or white, or a mixture of purple and white, various patterns, not regular patterns, just...I think the whole beauty of the trumpets, you know." (Clive)

Trish's mother encouraged her daughter's tastes,

"When I was little, I always wanted pansies, and mum would put them in every year and she would say - what do you want in? And I would say - pansies...I knew what I liked and I liked the garden when it was all flowery." (Trish)

One of Derek Jarman's first encounters with flowers was through the pages of a book, which left a lasting impression,

'Beautiful Flowers and How to Grow Them – a few months after my fourth birthday my parents gave me this large Edwardian garden book full of delightful watercolour illustrations...Beautiful Flowers was to be my bible for many years: I pored over its exotic pages, scribbled in coloured crayon across its illustrations and made my own first drawings of flowers by copying it.' (Jarman, 1992 p10)

Negative memories of childhood gardens

It is also important to say that not all memories of gardens were positive. One or two people were simply indifferent and these possibly reflected parents' own indifference,

"I don't remember them ever setting it out. I thought it was all very ordinary, a path down one side and a lawn in the middle, and I enjoyed it for playing in a bit, but it never excited me as a garden." (Roger)

There were some isolated accounts that did indicate more negative emotions in relation to gardens encountered during childhood. In Grace's account the garden represented work towards the specific target of the 'perfect' garden, but with little freedom, and no opportunities for exploration or self-expression, to counterbalance this,

"And my father was always keen, but I was never really allowed to do anything other than help him. I don't remember being given a plot of my own. But his interest in it, I suppose, must have rubbed off on me to some extent... I suppose I resented it. In rather the same way as my mother would have liked to have been helped in the kitchen, but not, you know, I wouldn't be doing it myself. So I probably resented it a bit. It was child labour, you know? ...My parents would never sit in a garden. They would work in it, to get it perfect. But they never, ever, in my knowledge, ever, just sat in it."
(Grace)

Others recalled being repelled by perfect gardens, and by the restrictions placed on their enjoyment of them,

"I think the reason I don't remember going out into [my grandparent's garden] is because in my mind they were such pristine places that I wouldn't have wanted to play there in case I either kicked a ball into a rose bush or something so I think I associate fragility with my grandparents one." (Mike)

"...my uncle used to go mad because we used to pick the alyssum and lobelia for bride's bouquets when we played in the garden [laughs]. "Don't touch, don't touch" and I think it's awful that you must say to children "Don't touch this and don't put your foot on that" because they've got to have somewhere to play." (Kath)

Another account which seemed not negative but untypical was given by Alex, who highlighted the competition that went on in the garden between him and his brother,

"...and so me and my brother- there were just the two of us – were allocated our two little plots and his always grew far better than mine – to the point where we even had two pine trees we were given and even his pine tree grew better than mine... The only thing was I was the big brother... I got more pocket money than him so when he grew better things than me I could buy them from him and put them in my plot." (Alex)

Alex's account seemed untypical because the emphasis in most cases was on mutual enjoyment of the garden by siblings and this aspect was much less apparent in his account whilst the competitive element was highlighted.

Themes across individual lives

This chapter has so far focussed on the themes that have cut across cases but it has not been possible to show how these themes emerge within, and are then played out across, an individual life course. The excerpt from Gerald's case study (p147) is provided to illustrate more fully how Gerald recollected his earliest experiences of gardening and later chapters will present excerpts from other stages in Gerald's life to show the ongoing story. The case illustrates a number of themes which have been evident in other people's accounts and referred to above, but it is also distinctive in the sense that it is an account of gardens and gardening experienced within a particular historical and social context and, as it shows, the context influences the way gardening is experienced and, perhaps, the way some meanings take on special significance for an individual. Other case studies are included in Appendix VI.

Excerpt from Case Study 1: Gerald's Childhood Recollection

Gerald's early years were lived against the backdrop of war - he was four years old when the Second World War started. It was not just this war that coloured Gerald's life but also the First World War whose aftermath was still being felt and to which he makes frequent reference. War was not just a distant idea for the young Gerald, it affected people he knew and war time events provide him with markers for the events in his own life,

"I started school about 1940, and I remember that, because it was the beginning of the war and an uncle of mine was seventeen and a half and he was put in the Queen's Regiment and he was captured in the Ardennes - that was before Dunkirk"

Gerald spent his summers until he was about 12 at his grandparent's house. His grandfather, was the head gardener of a large country estate, working well past retirement age, because of a shortage of men on the estate; as Gerald says,

"...after the First World war a lot of men didn't come back because they had been killed, and so they were very short of people in the gardens. And I remember there were land girls who worked in the gardens, six or eight land girls, and several men who had survived the First World War."

Even deep in the countryside the realities of war were not far away,

"...there was a big aerodrome on part of the estate for bombers to fly from ...high land...the bombers could take off with a full load [but} they had to fell all the woods."

Captured uncles, woods felled to allow the movement of bombers, talk of men killed and not returning; Gerald doesn't say what sense he made of these things but it is not too much to suppose that they conjured up a world which was, at the least, unreliable, unpredictable and linked with loss. He paints a picture of his grandfather as a close companion, who, through the gardening and other activities that they shared, carved out for his grandson days of certainty and responsibility,

"Grandfather used to give me so much work every morning - I had to weed or do something like that, you see, or sweep up...he would stand with me until he thought I had got it right. He didn't allocate me to someone else in the garden to do it. As the Head gardener, he was an old fashioned Victorian and he would be - "you haven't pulled that out, come on"."

"He would say to me in the afternoons, "Now you write so many letter A's and you join them altogether, and all the B's and it was to get your hand flowing because he used to write with what we described as copper plate writing...that was how he was writing all the diaries which were kept everyday for what was growing in the garden...on payday when he made the pay up into little pay packets... and he would say - "count these pennies"."

It was not all work; his grandfather had created a wonderland for Gerald to explore,

"...these big chunks of rock created this rock garden, and I can remember different types of butterfly you found there...grandfather laid all this moss and it was like walking on a thick carpet."

Gerald learned to value a sense of regularity and self-control and he developed a sense of duty. A pattern had been set,

"... that went right the way through my life, accepting responsibilities, I think it gave you a purpose in life..."

Summary of chapter

The chapter, so far, has demonstrated that most people had positive and pleasurable recollections of their childhood gardens. These were recalled as both private and social spaces. As a private world, they contributed to the child's need for solitude and privacy and offered an escape from the stresses and strains of daily life. For some children the garden seemed to offer a strategy for coping with the demands arising from major life challenges such as serious parental illness, or parental disharmony. As a social space, the gardens offered activity, shared fun and a space to develop feelings of mastery and self-efficacy. Parents and other adults were important role models and played both direct, mediating, and indirect, enabling, roles which supported the child's developing relationship to gardening. The case studies emphasise the importance of considering the broader influence of the social and historical context on the ways gardens and gardening are experienced.

The childhood recollections were often fragmentary but give a sense of themes which will become better articulated during the adult years and which will be explored more fully in later chapters. Table 2 (overleaf) provides an overview of the nature of childhood recollections and summarises the emerging themes.

Table 2: Major Themes in Recollections of Childhood Gardens

Major themes	Sub-themes/concepts within themes
Memories of childhood gardens	Vivid but glimpses rather than coherent stories Memories positive – about enjoyment, pleasure and activity Sensory memories recollected strongly
Aesthetic appreciation	Encouraged by parents and other adults Specific plants readily recalled in adulthood Individual taste in gardens already developing
Close engagement with materials of garden	Materials put to child's own use; development of fantasy
Gardens seen as places of freedom	Own space: control held by child Creative play without feeling of restriction Private world – fantasy and imagination can develop
Attachment to specific places	Links with security in uncertain world Strong recall in later years.
Gardens as places of escape	Solitude, distance from things which unsettled, relaxation, distraction, recovery
Control	Dominion, shaping a world, taking charge, beginning to take responsibility. Sense of danger /lack of control emerging.
Connections and adult influences	Gardens as places of connections between children and adults, children and peers, children and pets. Adults as role models, teachers, facilitators and enablers.
Helping/work/chores	Learning from role models, nurturing and care, mastery, responsibility and contribution, merges with play very readily.
Social space	Fun with siblings, friends, pets. Freedom for play
Negative meanings	Chores not counterbalanced by fun. Pristine gardens: lack of freedom, potential to damage
Untypical case	Competition with siblings and friends

Discussion

Childhood seems to be a peak time for awareness of gardens and gardening; virtually all of the people I interviewed were keen to recall gardens they had known in their earliest years. As I listened to them, the recollections conveyed to me a real sense of pleasure and fun. The strength of people's retrospective memories of childhood gardens has been highlighted by Bhatti (2006) and there is a significant body of research, and evidence from personal memoirs, that suggest that gardens, and other natural environments, are indeed important places both within adult memories of childhood and for children themselves (Sebba, 1991, Chawla, 1992, Francis, 1995, Kidd and Brascamp, 2004, Gross and Lane, 2007).

Most of the meanings, which will be discussed fully in later chapters, can be seen in embryonic form in these recollections and this suggests that the meanings of gardens for adults may be rooted in childhood experiences. However the meanings, whilst they are wide ranging, are seldom fully fleshed out; they often provide us with mere glimpses rather than a coherent story. What seems absolutely clear is that the recollections were expressed in almost entirely positive terms. There is a real sense of fun and pleasure in the accounts of childhood gardens and I gained a very strong impression that these gardens had been enjoyed at the time and they were still, in recollection, a source of enormous satisfaction.

The discussion has, however, not been straightforward to write. I have struggled because some of the things, that I suggest are important about gardens and childhood, are not easy to substantiate with the available evidence. As I have attempted to put the ideas down on paper they have slipped away from me – they seem elusive, hard to pin down - but I want to give a sense of this struggle rather than simply discuss those ideas that are easy to formulate and back up. I suggest the difficulties might even reflect some important characteristics about the nature of the childhood experiences and their impact on adult gardeners.

The difficulty seems to stem from three overlapping issues. First there is a mismatch between the picture I built of childhood gardens whilst carrying out the interviews, and the ‘factual’ evidence contained in the transcripts, making me uncertain about the strength of the arguments I can reliably make. Second the memories of childhood gardens contained in the transcripts were vivid but rather snapshot-like; they were not as fully fleshed out as the accounts of adult gardens, making them difficult to pull into themes and build a discussion around. Thirdly, and underpinning the first two points, there is the whole debate about the reliability of retrospective accounts. All of the respondents were looking back over lengthy periods, some as much as eighty or ninety years, and their memories might be faulty and are certainly filtered through the experiences of adulthood. Is it safe to assume that the memories genuinely represent what the child felt at the time? Are they just adult interpretations of the past? Could they be the products of nostalgia – life recalled through rose-tinted spectacles - or attempts to present an idealised version of childhood?

To consider the first two issues together, I came away from the interviews feeling certain that gardens were very special places for children - the sense of fun and pleasure was obvious to me - and I assumed that the analysis would clearly provide the grounds for this certainty. This assumption was partly but not entirely justified. The verbal accounts were colourful but not always that detailed. The evidence mostly amounted to what I have referred to as glimpses into lives. I was genuinely very surprised not to discover much more depth in the transcripts and questioned the accuracy of my impressions. The impact of the interviews on me seemed more than was warranted by the words in the transcripts. It seems plausible that the explanation for this discrepancy lies in the non-verbal content of the interviews. I had, I think, responded to the smiles and laughter, the twinkling eyes, the faraway looks and the inflections in the speech, as people recalled the snap-shots - the ride in the wheelbarrow, the poppies at shoulder height, the velvet moss, the scent of grandfather’s geraniums. These memories had stirred emotions in the participants, emotions which were conveyed to me but, perhaps, not always fully captured in the words, as I had unwittingly imagined would be the case. My field notes, made

immediately after the interviews, confirmed that my impressions were those made at the time, but when I came to analyse the whole body of data there was certainly a mismatch.

Initially, I thought I should just report 'the facts' but I realised that a really important point may be lost in doing that. It seemed to me that recalling childhood gardens did not so much elicit specific memories but rather stimulated some powerful feelings and associations. This emotionally based association was, arguably, the very thing which had carried forward into adulthood, which I was picking up, but which cannot consistently be tied to specific memories and captured in words. The emotional pull of the garden arising from childhood associations, I suggest, may be a more powerful influence on adult gardeners than more specific memories of what they actually did in the garden as children. If this argument is accepted then the third question about reliability of memories becomes somewhat redundant. I suppose an analogy might be with the way summers are recalled; not all summers are sunny and bad things happen in summer, but the good ones leave a potent legacy, so that the word summer conjures up for many people feelings of pleasure, warmth and hopefulness that informs them as they encounter new summers and talk about past summers. It is this 'afterglow', I suggest, that they transmit to others when talking about summer, rather than a precisely recalled memory.

In a way I am saying that the spectacles through which childhood gardens are viewed may indeed be rose-tinted, however, the gardens are not so much misremembered because of this; rather, they had elements that were significant enough to influence the tint of the spectacles through which the gardens are later viewed. The way the childhood garden is recalled will perhaps influence hopes and expectations of gardening in adulthood. Chawla (1999 p16) writes 'As we proceed through our lives, what matters most is not the actual past but how we understand and use the past in meeting the present and the future' and this chimes very much with what I am saying here. The question then arises as to what these elements might be – what are the associations with the childhood garden that gives the memories their emotional power? It is instructive here to

look at the discrepant accounts of gardens, both those where the gardens were actively disliked and those which produced indifference - gardens which were certainly not viewed through any rose-tinted lens - to see what was different about the memories of those gardens.

The gardens recalled in negative terms were ones where the child's freedom to play was curtailed – they were 'pristine' places - places where the child felt controlled – 'look but don't touch', 'don't spoil', in essence 'don't play' - these seemed to be the messages of those gardens; messages which produced anxiety. This negative experience points to one of the key elements necessary to promote children's enjoyment of gardens and that is having sufficient freedom to actively use the garden for their own pursuits, whether these are social or solitary, without troublesome fear of the consequences. In the main, the gardens invited play, providing rich and dynamic play materials, and parents stood back. This latter point is, in itself, worthy of note because these were generally parents who were themselves keen gardeners, and who might be expected to protect their creations from childish pursuits, but this did not seem to be the case and I will return to this point in a later chapter.

One or two people had indifferent, 'take it or leave it', memories of childhood gardens and in their case this seemed to reflect the indifference of the parents to gardening. This suggests another aspect of childhood appreciation of gardens and gardening that might be important, and that is the opportunities the garden affords for interaction between children and interested adults. Certainly my findings suggest that adults played a very big role in children's memories of childhood gardens.

This poses something of a conundrum for, on the one hand, good memories of gardens were associated with absence of parental influence but, on the other hand, parents were also a fairly universal and welcome presence in the childhood memories and there was considerable interaction and direct influence. This seems to point to two key modes for appreciating the garden and that is as a private world, where parents (and indeed other children) were absent, and as a social world where all kinds of interactions took place. These two worlds seem

to lend themselves to supporting different sets of meanings both of which are important for children.

The private world was one where children seemed to experience nature most directly and spontaneously, ‘bumping into’ experiences as they played, pottered, and explored. There was a sense of close engagement with the various materials in the garden and sensory perceptions were highlighted; so Gerald discovers the velvety feel of moss, and Andrew tunnels into the soil and jumps from heights. Palmer et al (1999 p184) refer to such memories as ‘sensory flashes of childhood’ and Sebba’s (1991) work, which looks at both adults’ recollections of childhood environments and children’s own contemporary accounts, seems very relevant here. She suggests that adult recollections are unlikely to be accurate representations of childhood experiences but that there is a connection between the qualities of a childhood experience and the way it is etched into memory and recalled later (p395). She draws on a range of theoretical literature on child development which suggests that children have a unique affinity to their environment, an affinity that will not endure to adulthood, and that arises from their developmental needs. In early childhood, she argues, perceptions and cognitions are very closely reliant on physical interaction with the environment and on direct sensory information. With maturation, and, especially with the greater ability to think in abstraction, cognitive processes take precedence and direct physical interaction is no longer so vital, and there can be a distancing from the environmental stimuli.

From her research Sebba argues that children comprehend the natural environment differently to the man-made world. They are drawn to it and recognise that it offers a greater range of sensory stimuli, stimuli which are often uncontrolled, making the environment dynamic and challenging. She found that children’s writings about nature indicated ways in which nature directly stimulated their senses, their actions and their feelings; it was not just the backdrop to these things. Children were consistently positive about the natural world. In recollection adults often recalled these sensory experiences in very clear terms because they were at their peak during childhood.

The private world of the garden may provide another important opportunity for some children, and that is as a means of escape. This can simply mean 'being away from' – and Gross and Lane (2007) use it in this more general way. The garden was certainly an escape, in this sense, for most of the people in my study. A small number of the adults recalled using hidden corners of the garden and sitting in favourite trees as part of their childhood coping repertoire in the face of stressful situations. It is very difficult to unravel the factors underlying this particular use of the garden; it could be that it provided physical separation from the house and/or parental figures; that it provided opportunity for solitude and reflection; it could be that the garden's natural environment was, in itself, settling and supportive of recovery, or that it provided distraction. Most likely it will be a composite of these and it could be that some urban environments could offer similar opportunities (Scopelliti and Giuliani, 2004). These issues will be explored in more depth in later chapters but it is clear that there is good evidence linking natural places with restorative experience for adults and a small, but growing, body of evidence indicates that this may also be the case for children (Owens, 1988, Wells, 2000, Taylor et al., 2002, Wells and Evans, 2003). Epidemiological studies have found lower incidence of depressive illness amongst children with greatest access to green space (Maas et al., 2009). Some authors (Korpela et al., 2002) have questioned whether restorative places need to be private places but certainly amongst my small sample the clearest expressions of such use were associated with solitude.

I will turn now to consider the social world of the childhood garden. Surprisingly, few of the participants made detailed reference to other children but, as I indicated above, parents and grandparents were very prominent figures in most of the recollections. This raises the question of whether these adults play an important role in fostering later appreciation of gardens and gardening. Certainly, several of the people interviewed seemed to believe this to be the case. There is little research into the antecedents of gardening behaviour but there is an established body of research which suggests parents and other adults may play a significant role in determining adult awareness of a range of environmental issues and influence adult usage of the natural environment for leisure (Chawla, 1999, Palmer et al., 1999, Lohr and Pearson-Mims, 2004). It is

difficult to say that these studies automatically illuminate anything about gardening but they point to the importance of adult influences during childhood on valuing nature and there is likely to be some crossover. These studies together highlight a number of ways in which parents may play a role: through direct sharing of knowledge, skills and values; through role modelling care and concern for the natural world; through the provision of opportunities for accessing nature, and for their tolerance of children's play involving natural elements such as soil and water. There were examples of all of these in my study.

In conclusion, it is difficult to be too definite about childhood recollections of gardens. On the one hand gardens seemed to be recalled in favourable terms, and were associated with a strongly positive affective response. On the other hand evidence was somewhat fragmentary. Sebba's (1991) theoretical work suggests that the apparent strength and longevity of garden recollections may reflect the way in which they were etched into the memory, concerned as they were with very direct sensory involvement of the child with the materials of the garden, a level of involvement which was only available in childhood. There seems to be a distinction between recollections which focus on the garden as a private sphere and those which have a more social content. Both seem important and may reflect different sets of meanings though there is undoubted overlap. The private may link more with exploration and imaginative play, and have a cognitive developmental function. The private sphere may also provide opportunities for solitude and escape with a restorative function as part of a coping response. The garden as a space for interaction with interested adults, and other children, seems to be particularly associated with developing social skills and roles and building opportunities for cross generational relationships. It is clear that both private and social worlds can support identity development. Identity issues are considered in much greater depth in the next chapter which looks at adult experiences of gardening but in particular explores the period when people return to gardening after the trough in adolescence.

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Chapter 5

Gardening in Adulthood

‘Coming into bloom’

One of the aims of the study was to explore whether there is a life course profile to gardening. The previous chapter highlighted the importance of childhood experiences and put forward the suggestion that childhood may be a critical, formative, period for the development of an ongoing interest in gardening. The next three chapters consider adult experiences and central to each chapter is a change in the profile of gardening. This chapter explores the reasons why people resume gardening after the barren period of adolescence and early adulthood, and also considers changes that relate to becoming a family with children. The next chapter will concentrate on gardening in relation to negative life events when, for many people, there was pronounced intensification of interest and activity, and the third chapter looks at the latter part of adulthood when gardeners face a decline in their physical capacity to undertake gardening activity.

Within this chapter I will concentrate on the overarching theme of identity. Other topics, such as the garden as a social space, could be explored much more fully but shortage of space make it necessary to be selective. Issues to do with identity are conspicuous in the accounts and, in particular, become apparent in relation to the resumption of gardening, seem complex, and are important enough to warrant sufficient space for their proper discussion. I will first summarise other themes, such as ‘connection’ or ‘control’, in a table, so that their breadth and nature can be considered and whilst these themes may be referred to again in this chapter, directly in relation to identity, they will not be discussed individually. The theme of identity cuts across cases and encompasses many of the themes identified in the table. I am not going to ignore the other themes altogether; in subsequent chapters I will be exploring some of them, such as ‘escape’ ‘control’ and ‘time’, in much greater depth as

they have particular relevance to the findings related to gardening and life events or to gardening in old age

Themes within the accounts of gardening

In the previous chapter (see Table 2 p149) I described a number of themes which emerged in the accounts of childhood gardens. What quickly became evident was that the same themes are recognisable in the adult accounts though, with adulthood, they obviously take on new significance and it seems important to give us sense of these themes (Table 3 below) before I go on to discuss the re-awakening of interest in gardening and issues to do with identity. There are also some new themes, not found in the childhood accounts.

Table 3: Major Themes in Accounts of Gardening in Adulthood

Major themes	Sub-themes/concepts within themes
Connections	Garden as a shared social /family space Gardening as intergenerational bridge Garden as site for memories Gardening as a mutual activity / reciprocity through gardening Spiritual connections Being at one with the natural world
Control	Domination of garden, and shaping own world Structuring /dominating force of nature Awareness/acceptance of ultimate lack of control
Time	Planning for future times Awareness of time passing Working with life's rhythms, feeling connected Sense of timelessness
Care and nurturing	Responsibility and duty to care Caring as a moral way of living Satisfaction from processes of gardening: bringing things to life Challenge of pests and predators Space for nurturing children /self
Escape	Sanctuary /somewhere to hide Sense of timelessness Peace Respite and Recovery Privacy and solitude (v. loneliness) Absorption and distraction
Pleasure and satisfaction	Fun, enjoyment, playfulness Giving pleasure to others Appreciation of /thankfulness for gardening and gardens
Aesthetic appreciation	Appreciation of beauty, form ,colour, design, chance findings, light, dark, shade Sensual pleasures: sights, sounds, smells, texture
Creativity	Pride in creative outcomes Satisfaction from design process Individual expression Playfulness Gardens as 'forgiving' spaces, accepting of errors
Functional relationship to gardening	Food, play space, space for pets, space for eating, entertaining
Identity (Cross cutting /overarching theme)	Self expression /individuality Self esteem, mastery, pride /maintaining appearances Being part of something /emplacement/place attachment Lifestyle preferences, playfulness Self sufficiency / Provider and carer Competition Resistance to label of gardener, self-consciousness, coherence Gardening as resistance to identity threats

The re-awakening of interest

Having said that adolescence and early adulthood were times for most people when interest in gardening lay dormant, for the people in my study, all keen gardeners, there obviously had to come a time when they were drawn back to the activity. The interviews showed that this was variable in terms of when it happened; for some the period of dormancy was short lived but for others it continued for many years. Interest in gardening could not, then, be said to be directly age-related. So what were the factors associated with re-engagement with gardens and gardening?

Life stage: home of one's own

It was fairly clear that a renewed interest was predominantly associated with life stage; for most people the catalyst was moving into what they saw as a first 'proper' home of their own, settled, and separate from the parental home. Sometimes this coincided with marriage, but this was by no means general,

"And then I got married and had my first garden and it all came back again and I was really quite keen from then on - quite a smallish garden there but I found it quite pleasant just to go out and spend time in the garden" (Diana)

For some the garden had been the essential element that made the house or flat desirable as a 'proper' home,

"When I was twenty-four I bought a flat with a garden. I had been saving up the whole of my training because I wanted a house with a garden. And I had acquired a cat by then as well. So I went to the estate agent and said – I want a ground floor flat with a garden and cat flap" (Trish)

"...then getting our first house – so it was sort of getting married and getting our first house ...yes so when we got married getting a house with a garden was a big priority – getting a house with a south facing garden was a big priority ... Just sort of outdoor-space – was it a kind of symbol of growing up?" (Alex)

As Alex intimates, there was sometimes a sense that assuming responsibility for the garden – gardening being something that 'grown ups' did - was a sign to others that someone had accepted the mantle of adulthood with its associated

responsibilities. A garden of one's own, even at a rented property, could feel very different from the parental garden,

"Yeah, I think, because it's mine and I have decided how to do it, and I'm not accountable to them, and it doesn't matter at all, and I can eat it [the vegetables] when I want." (Ellie)

Actual ownership was certainly an important driver for some people,

"I probably would not have done it if it was rented. I would probably – I have always been told that I make wherever I am mine so I would have probably put the odd pot plant out and whatever but not gone to the extent that I have done" (Mike)

One person, Leona, who only started gardening when she was well into her middle years, had never previously had the opportunity to garden; she was not encouraged as a child and had not hitherto had a garden of her own. It was not that she had been indifferent but, rather, she had been held back through lack of opportunity,

"...I used to just buy flowers, and do indoors, and so on. But I always read books, and anybody I see with garden, I always try to make a friend with them." (Leona)

On moving to her first house with a garden she was encouraged to try gardening by a neighbour and, despite her interest, this encouragement did seem important to get her started,

"...so when I came in there was a lady across the road, she introduced me to flowers. She take me to the garden [centre], to buy flowers. I started off from two pots to three pots and everything. And when she mentioned garden to me, oh my God, it was like the whole world opened up." (Leona)

Of all the people interviewed, the pleasure of gardening was embodied most visibly by Leona. As she told me about her whole world opening up her face glowed and, beaming from ear to ear, she quite simply radiated a sense of joyfulness.

Sense of duty

It would not, however, be true to say that everyone relished taking on the responsibilities of the garden; a minority simply did it because it was there and

needed doing - one of the responsibilities of adult life but not necessarily a welcome one,

“...our first house was on a brand new building site, and so that was starting from scratch, it was piles of sand in one corner and earth in another, and that sort of thing, so we started from the beginning. But it was still, it was quite small. And again, it was almost a chore rather than a...I didn't do it for the pleasure”(Roger)

Others had gardening forced upon them by circumstance and a sense of duty,

“It was during the Second World War – well ‘dig for victory’ – that’s what it boiled down to...” (Arthur)

“Yes, my father died, so there was nobody to do the garden, my mother was working as well” (Clive)

Historical influences

Historical events brought new opportunities, and also new duties, for one of the gardeners, Elena, who was newly married and still living in her country of origin, Romania, when communism fell. She described how life changed completely at that time,

“Suddenly everyone, overnight, had a different kind of freedom, so we could have our own businesses...” (Elena)

Land, previously taken from families for state control, was unexpectedly returned to them. Her husband's family had, by that time, adopted professional lifestyles and were ill prepared, in terms of time, skills and money, for taking back the responsibilities of looking after their returned land. With memories of her grandfather's abundant garden, Elena said she felt a real sense of determination to make productive use of the land and she and her husband took responsibility for part of it, which they utilised as their garden. Elena's account is full of references to external circumstances that shaped her family's approach to their gardens during those transitional years. Not least was a shortage of money, but she also refers to a shortage of flowers,

“...you couldn't go and buy roses – honestly - at least not in my area...”

She describes how daily life was seldom easy to negotiate and bribes and payments were part and parcel of many transactions,

“There, if you wanted something sorted, you have to pay or give something...it wasn’t straightforward...the service was free...but you had to give something...flowers or chocolates, but chocolates were not available, the shops were empty.” (Elena)

Her father had seen the opportunity for using his garden for commercial purposes and in the latter years of communism, as restrictions gradually slackened, he had developed a rose growing business. Flowers were easy to sell and were often bought as currency for smoothing the way. In her newly acquired garden, Elena decided to follow his example. From her parents and grandfather Elena had built considerable gardening know-how, and contacts, and was able to put these to good use to develop a small scale, but profitable, garden-based flower-growing enterprise which, ultimately, became the catalyst for a fully fledged fruit and vegetable supply business which extended way beyond the scale of the garden. Her approach to gardening was driven by circumstance; when asked about her chief motivation for gardening Elena replied, *“In Romania, money”*.

In the preceding section I have given a sense of why people resumed gardening in adulthood. For Elena, there was clearly a complex set of motivations which were part driven by personal factors - her family background, her love of growing things, her feelings of responsibility to use the land - and part driven by broader political and social forces which influenced living conditions, commercial opportunities and demands.

Elena’s motivations were somewhat out of the ordinary; generally reasons given by the gardeners were to do with life stage or life transitions, and coupled with these there was a strong awareness that gardening was associated with taking on a role associated with being an adult and was a way of demonstrating this status and competence to others, in other words, a way of expressing the adult identity. Settled housing, especially homes which were owned rather than rented, provided many people with their first real opportunity to take on the role of gardener. For some this was a chore but for most it was a welcome opportunity.

‘Self-conscious’ gardeners: working out identities

I would not wish to give the impression that all of the people who voluntarily returned to gardening embraced it as readily as Leona or Elena. For some there was an element of surprise at their own interest, it was not something that they had either sought or desired; for Mike, who had an early career as a musician in a rock band, gardening was not part of his usual conduct,

‘...[I] would have laughed hysterically if you even hinted at the idea – the idea of me going into Homebase – I would have laughed because its such – its just- you know, its not what one does...[but] having bought my first place I found very quickly that I was going into the garden part of it and enthusiastically seeing things’ (Mike)

And the youngest person interviewed, Ellie, resisted the label of ‘gardener’, though she did not resist the activity itself,

‘Oh, it makes me feel really old. And I can’t get out of the mindset that it’s kind of old and boring, which I know is wrong. But, yeah...I think it’s because I haven’t, you know, psychologically embraced it’ (Ellie aged 25)

Alex, despite prioritising a garden as a ‘must have’ at his first adult home, was glad that it was already in a good state and required little maintenance and he constantly stressed its importance as a social space rather than as a space for cultivation, downplaying his own involvement in the actual hands-on gardening,

‘Yes something you could share with your friends ... it was all inherited from a previous owner who clearly was keen – and I vaguely maintained it’ (Alex)

Throughout the interview, Alex seemed to struggle with the idea of himself as a keen gardener, though he had been recruited as such to the study, and clearly had spent many hours, over many years, on the activity. It was as if he struggled to accept this aspect of himself. This may have been because it was something he associated too closely with his parents and with their ‘suburban’ lifestyle,

*‘Gardening is **definitely** a big bit of my parents’ life - brought up in a large suburban house with a large suburban garden and all Dad ever seemed to do was do the garden – very important for him’
(Alex)*

He was very much keener to talk about himself as an *allotment gardener* but even this was within a very specific context,

*'And there was something about the allotment culture – it was a Lambeth squatted allotment – it was anarchic. A little bit edgy, people were pretty alternative ...so it's **not some nice little tranquil place** like the Dulwich Allotments with rules – you have to maintain it, all very ordered and tranquil and middle aged – **this is not** (his emphases)' (Alex)*

As well as stressing its anarchic qualities, Alex again stressed the effortless social potential of his allotment,

'I'd love to be able to get my mate, Rob, a plot....Get a few mates, build a group there a bit...We wouldn't be very good drinking partners in a bar – it's a nice easy way –just digging a bit – no planned meetings – sometimes you meet –“how's your veggie doing?” ...if we were three of us stuck in a bar together we probably wouldn't know what to talk about – we certainly wouldn't plan to meet but happening to bump into each other is a great pleasure'
(Alex)

Another person, Andrew, describes himself as a 'guerrilla gardener'; of the younger gardeners interviewed (he was twenty-eight) he had perhaps gardened most consistently throughout his life with only the shortest of pauses in his late teenage years. He did not have access to a garden in his current home in a city centre tower block but had been motivated to plant up neglected tubs outside his building because he could see that it needed doing, but also,

'Pride! Pride! Being embarrassed that my friends coming round here to visit me would think I lived in a slum. It was as simple as that, I felt embarrassed and wanted to do it up and so it seemed like common sense to do it – I know how to garden, I enjoy gardening but it was the fact that it was so bad and I was embarrassed about it – was the actual trigger rather than me going 'oh I need to garden, I need green space'. I've never really had that feeling it's much more, it's just that if it is there, if there is the opportunity there to do it then I will just do it. And I think that is because that's since before I can remember that's what I did' (Andrew)

His first forays into guerrilla gardening were done in secret, in the dead of night, but by the time of the interview were being done in daylight with groups of like-minded friends and many other people, strangers, contacted over the internet.

The guerrilla gardening had taken off but Andrew was quite clear that there were some pragmatic reasons behind his style of gardening,

'...there's a generation like me who don't have our own gardens because we can't afford it and – property prices, garden flats are at a premium – and I made the choice that actually I prefer to have lots of space, huge amounts of storage space for my records and I wanted a place where I could keep a car in a garage - that was more important to me than having a house with a garden even though I like gardening' (Andrew)

But there were some reasons which were not pragmatic but more to do with asserting a different lifestyle; one which was less privatised, privileged the social, and had a currency about it, being in tune with the 'Information Age',

'...actually having one's own patch is a bit boring – there is something more satisfying in gardening in an area where you know everyone's going to enjoy so yeah, I think there are a lot of people like that wanting to do it and going to Hyde Park doesn't count, sitting around in a nice park someone else has done, is not the same as having something in your local community that you've done, you've been involved in and there is the social side to it. I mean meeting all sorts of fascinating people from all sorts of backgrounds as well – it's definitely a fun evening' (Andrew)

'...and I now have the opportunity to go out gardening with 40 people at the same time and do far bigger areas and people have given me money and given me plants and people in other corners of the country, and other corners of the world, are also doing it or want to do it and we put them in touch with likeminded people'
(Andrew)

Both Alex and Andrew had snatched the opportunity to garden in the face of authority. Andrew's identity goal is however completely different to, indeed almost the reverse of, Alex's goal. For Andrew, the guerrilla gardening is a rebellious and unconventional act but it seems that his aim, in seeking to beautify the ugliness of his inner city neighbourhood that he describes as a 'slum', is to resist the challenges these surrounding pose to his sense of self which derives from his roots in the middle classes. He is seeking to hold on to a certain class identity, whereas Alex is seeking to distance himself from the same. Andrew's comments show how his sense of self, that he needed to hold on to, was reflected back to him through the eyes of his friends. He wants them

to know that the surroundings are not a sign of the 'real him' – so he modifies the surroundings to improve the fit with his sense of self.

Gardening can be adapted to support identity needs

In the above accounts there was a sense of people who wanted to garden but who were resistant to being seen to garden in a manner that was too redolent of a world which discomforted them in some way - too privatised, too conformist or simply not in tune with the needs, desires, and possibilities for their own generation. In these accounts there was self-consciousness about gardening which seemed not to be there in the accounts of the majority of older people in the study; there was a strong concern with lifestyle, and presenting a specific face to the world, and some of the gardeners were very well aware of this concern,

'Oh Yes then we can have friends round and tell the story of hey this came from our squatted allotment so we can appear to be the radical people amidst the staid ritual of Sunday lunch – that hint of radicalism - this didn't just come from the organic counter at Sainsbury's - oh no – like everybody else's - I grew it – "Oh you have time for an allotment, how do you do that? What is it like? Boring isn't it really?" Actually No!' (Alex)

'...I think with that for the first time in my life buying magazines like Elle Decoration and all the decoration magazines of which I would have never paid an interest in before I bought the property. And inevitably a by-product of that was that some of those pages would look at gardens and I would start to see and want to try and create things that I saw in that. So it was very much kind of, I dunno, what's the word, interpolate, I think is the word, you, you - when you kind of become – or want to identify with whatever it that you are actually seeing there and gradually as that starts to happen then I start to have the beginnings of a growing sense of pride in what is being created.' (Mike)

Mike tried hard to make sense of what his garden meant to him and his sense of self,

'...It fulfils a much bigger part of my own insecurity, inferiority complex, ... it is fitting – it is almost like umm what is the word – what is it that they put between bricks?...It's the mortar if you like that - or it's the sort of identity glue that's holding bits or building bits – to what I would like ultimately to become – I suppose.' (Mike)

Sometimes it seemed as if gardening activity needed to be constrained in certain ways so that individuals could sustain their sense of self. For Ellie, for example, growing vegetables was somehow compatible with the person she wanted to be whilst flower gardening was clearly ill-suited,

'... I see other people [gardening] as really serious, i.e. my parents, and their generation...I think because it's vegetables, because I am growing my own vegetables, that it's in line with whatever else I am, and represent, probably. If I was growing flowers I think I have a feeling that might be a bit weirder' (Ellie)

Growing vegetables, an output that you simply eat, could sit comfortably in opposition to, or contrast to, the issues which she was conscious of in other parts of her life, especially her work, and about which she experienced disquiet,

'...like I create outputs at work ...that gets criticised by the whole department and is sent up to a minister and then some horrible thing happens because of your output...A courgette can't hurt anyone...It may be over simplifying to say I just like it because it's simple. I think I like it because I feel like it's cutting out all the rubbish that I, intellectually, have issues with, to do with trade and agricultural production and everything like that. So in a way, and I know I buy seeds from people, so it's not really doing that, I am just watching them develop. It feels a bit like I am, I don't know, getting exposure to more options than what I disagree with in newspapers' (Ellie)

It was very evident that despite reluctance to fully embrace the label and the image of being a gardener, these same individuals had nevertheless fully embraced the *activity* as an important part of their lives; there was a strength in their desire to garden, and this was made most apparent to me when I asked Alex to think about the time when he might not be able to continue with his squatted allotment. Throughout his interview his words had flowed rapidly; suddenly he seemed at a loss, his jocularity gone,

Lesley: *So when you are too old or too frail to keep this plot going?*

Alex: *Oh, my gosh, then what?* [A's whole tone has changed; become more subdued and less bantering]

Lesley: *What will you do with it?*

Alex: *I don't know, Lesley, what a – [long pause] - perish the thought – perhaps perish is the word. Hmm.*

Ellie's Garden



"I feel more emotional pride and attachment to the potatoes than I think anyone else does. Oh my God, I can't believe I've just said that."

Ellie

Gardening permits playfulness with identity

The examples explored above are of people where the label gardener did not sit comfortably. Grace was very comfortable in the gardening role but the label 'slipped' in an interesting way during the interview. She had, for over twenty years, maintained a number of large tubs and troughs, part of the extensive and well maintained landscaping of her inner city housing development. She had adopted a very natural style of planting with wild flowers and grasses - a style which was at variance with most other displays on the estate – and a style for which she drew some criticism from other residents and the authorities. At one point in the interview, she referred to the tubs as her *far...*, and, with some embarrassment, she picked up on this later,

'...I think that is probably why, that slip of the tongue, I nearly said farm early on. As a child I remember thinking I would have liked to have done farming, so I think it is perhaps that coming out in me. A bit of arable, at least!' (Grace)

Grace, an artist, went on to say that she had never really put this idea into words before but she began to see parallels in some of the art work that she was making,

'...a lot of my ceramic work recently has been aerial views, as it were, inspired by aerial photos of fields and gardens and allotments, looking down on the boundary walls and the different textures of the fields, and I did several allotments with different sheds dotted around, and making things with balsa wood that you could press into the soft clay to make textures as different vegetables might make patterns, when you look down on it. So that is my farming as well' (Grace)

Gardening seemed to be providing Grace with the opportunity to play with aspects of her identity without actually doing anything to change her inner city lifestyle.

Gardening as a way to maintain connections

Many times in the interviews I found people describing their gardens as places that could provide a bridge between family members and especially as a link

between people of different generations, a source of continuity and perhaps self-worth,

“Yeh, I tell him about the allotment - so he realises that I am not some sort of just the urban chic brother but that we’ve still got something in common – maybe it’s a clinging on to those roots of my upbringing where it clearly was one of the values of my upbringing..” (Alex)

Michael Pollan writes movingly of his relationship with his grandfather; at times there had been a gulf in their understanding of each other; Michael knew he had disappointed his grandfather, but gardening was a topic that ultimately brought them closer,

“I was lucky when I took up gardening again my grandfather was still alive...I would bring him pictures, carefully culled to give an impression of neatness and order, and after examining them closely for weeds, he would pronounce his approval....The garden I described was largely imaginary...it was one of those places that is neither exactly in the past nor in the future, but that anyone who gardens is ever moving toward. It was still somewhere we could travel to together. On one of my last visits to see him, he told me I could have his Dutch hoe, declaring it was the best tool for weeding he had ever found. Grandpa was ninety-six, three times my age exactly, and though his step by then was uncertain, he took me outside and showed me how to use it.” (Pollan, 1991 p34)

Sometimes connections within a garden were quite tenuous yet could still arouse strong emotions. They did not have to be with family but could be with previous owners of the garden, with the gardening approached in such a way that their memories were accommodated and kept alive. Kincaid (2000 p21-22) writes,

“It is through the emotions of the youngest of these three men who grew up in the house...his lasting attachment to the house in which he grew up, that I view my house. He remembers when those ordinary unimpressive evergreens were planted...remembers how big they were in relation to his own height at the timethe botanist said the trees were not of any real interest....[but] he had never seen the youngest son...measure his grown self against the grown tree.” (p21)

The importance of this connection and association for Kincaid - and the strength of her affective response to it - is brought home when she tells us that,

"I once invited a man to dinner, a man who knows a lot about landscape and how to re-make it in a fashionable way....he said to me that what I ought to do is remove the trees. It is quite likely that I shall never have him back for a visit to my house...After he left I went around and apologized to the trees. I do not find such a gesture, apologizing to the trees, laughable." (P21-22)

Gardening and threats to identity

In a number of the quotes above there is a sense of people using gardening as a way of resisting threats to their sense of self. Identity issues were at the core of another person's account of her garden, but seemed different to those described above. Dionne happily embraced the idea of herself as a gardener, even though her plot was tiny, but she seemed to use her garden as a way of resisting ideas which undermined or threatened her identity, especially her ethnic identity. There was certainly nothing 'playful' and certainly no concern with 'lifestyle' about Dionne's resistance and this was possibly why her account stood apart from the other cases and which make it worth looking at in some detail.

Dionne had experienced a sense of culture shock when she encountered gardens when she first came to the UK from the Caribbean as a child,

"Gardening. Oh God. It is not about - it is about many things to me. But most important of all it is about nurturing and food, because, where I come from, the part of the world that I come from ...the Caribbean ...Gardening is where you get your food from. It is where you live. It is how you survive." (Dionne)

She had experienced surprise when she first realised that people in the UK did not always eat seasonally, or collect the apples that fell from their trees, and she expressed shock that some people grew ornamental cherry trees that would never fruit,

"...and when mangoes was finished you knew it was time for guavas, and that was what we ate; obviously, what the land produced, and we stuck to it. So coming up here, and seeing all these people with gardens that they actually didn't produce anything in baffled me. I couldn't understand. I didn't know why." (Dionne)

She felt a sense of alienation when she encountered places, like parks, where she was not allowed to pick the flowers or fruits,

“I wanted to know why I couldn’t pick the flowers. But I didn’t feel that it was mine. I knew I could go there every day and look at them, but I didn’t feel it was mine, because I wasn’t a part of it. I didn’t participate in it.” (Dionne)

Over the course of her interview Dionne became more impassioned and angry as she described experiences in the UK that had made her feel personally diminished, or feel that her cultural inheritance was being devalued or dismissed,

“The fact that certain indigenous plants - I resent that - that - in the Caribbean a lot of things that are indigenous to that or come from places like India and Africa, that they produce - It is ignored...And they take them elsewhere and reproduce them elsewhere and it is like saying to you – we don’t think much of you. Yeah...Well yeah, because it is like – we don’t need sugar cane anymore, because we have a different source.” (Dionne)

“So I started to look at where do things come from originally, and do they taste different when they are grown here. And the people who are not used to these indigenous fruit and have just been introduced to them, accept them like that. So, therefore, when they actually taste the real thing, they find it offensive, because they are saying – it doesn’t taste like that. So I was very offended at that, and I found that I would get quite upset about it, because here I was, going to buy a food that I know about, that I have seen growing as a child.” (Dionne)

As Dionne became more impassioned about this she became less coherent, and the sense I make of her account must be seen as somewhat conjectural; it was clear, however, that Dionne had come to realize that plants were living things that could be uprooted, transformed, transplanted, misunderstood, utilised and dropped when out of favour; the similarities with her own experiences as a migrant from a country with a colonial past, seemed fairly obvious. Plants were closely linked in her mind with ideas about exploitation; she gave specific examples drawn from her experiences as an art student,

“So I thought let’s see if they can understand about this fruit. So I got an old Victorian cake stand, which was glass, decorative, and I got a slave bangle and I put the slave bangle around the Victorian cake thing and I made the cashew fruits, little bits attached, and I displayed loads of them on top of this thing, and placed them on a table.” (Dionne).

She described a study trip to Poland and her angry rebuttal to an art professor's suggestion that an art work installed in a garden by a fellow student had spoiled the garden's natural beauty,

"...I find this garden offensive. And he goes – what do you mean? So I goes – look, you have got a palm tree there that is not indigenous to this country, Poland doesn't grow palm trees. How dare you? How do you know that that palm, sitting in a forest, minding its business, wanted your people to dig it up and bring it here and transplant it to grow in this cold place? You wouldn't like it. ..You have an aloe vera plant down the front of the house in a pot, and I am sure in the winter nobody brings it in. And it has to die... I said – that is not indigenous to here. I cannot speak for a plant, I don't know if it has a mind of its own, or what it feels. All I know is this is not it's place, and therefore you have taken it out, you may not have done it personally, but it has been taken from it's place and brought to another place, so it is the same difference." (Dionne)

It seemed that by growing the types of plants that she favoured at home, herbs, spices and vegetables, often bringing the seeds back with her from trips to the Caribbean and stressing their flavour, Dionne was perhaps trying to re-assert her own values and her own history,

"Because I use them and if I want to get them I might not find them. So it is best if I grow them myself. And also the potency is not the same. They [supermarkets] are not going to consider me because I am indifferent, in a way. I am a small little dot." (Dionne)

It is difficult to be emphatic about the way gardening related to Dionne's sense of herself – she never spells it out in concrete terms – but she seemed to hold on to her self-esteem and find satisfaction and reassurance from growing the familiar, bringing the very best out of it, and staying true to her cultural heritage,

"And I have got so many different things down there [in her garden]. And I like that. It makes me feel comfortable and it makes me feel good.'" (Dionne)

Dionne's story finds strong echoes in Jamaica Kincaid's writing,

'When it dawned on me that the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it, I did not tell this to the

gardeners who had asked me to explain the thing I was doing, or to explain what I was trying to do; I only marvelled that for me the garden is an exercise in memory, a way of remembering my immediate past, a way of getting to a past that that is my own (the Caribbean Sea) and the past as it is indirectly related to me (the conquest of Mexico and its surroundings)' (Kincaid, 2000 pxiv)

Gardening and self-esteem

It was fairly evident that gardening was a resource through which Dionne could hold on to her self-esteem. Gardening was an important source of self-esteem for several other people in the study. Diana for example was not working outside of the home, at the time of the interview, but seemed to find some of the positive attributes of employment through her garden. She approached it in a very methodical way, setting aside regular times to do it. She delegated some aspects to a gardener, but oversaw his work closely. She spent many hours each week on the garden and did not seek to make it low maintenance, she created work and said she wanted the effort and challenge. There was clearly a pay-off,

"And when you get people phoning up friends and saying can I come round and look at your garden please you think well I would love you to" (Diana)

Others expressed similar feelings,

"Well it gives me a lot of satisfaction to see those seeds coming up and there's no doubt about it in the summer we've been congratulated, praised on the garden that it looks magnificent and even ... one girl called one day, she was Dutch... "My mother thinks your garden is magnificent can we have a look round it?" or people that pass by say "Doesn't it look magnificent?" I mean all the daffodils are out and it really did look beautiful so that's nice to be praised, it is nice to be praised." (Kath)

Leona drew satisfaction from entering the local 'In Bloom' competition in which she had won 'best front garden' category on several occasions. This external endorsement of her efforts was important to her, and she proudly showed me the photographs and certificates which hung on her walls. Clearly she was eager to win but she seemed to derive even greater satisfaction and self esteem from being able to grow the plants well for her own sake,

"Feeling I have been successful with the garden, yeah" (Leona)

Leona's Garden



"I just love to see them, when I do my garden I stand back and watch it, and you feel such a...I can't explain to you. You know when you are little and you always want that dolly or the teddy, and when you finally get it you say – oh I didn't know I could have it. That's how I felt in my plants."

Leona, talking about her prize-winning garden

Foregrounding of themes within lives: building a coherent story

Individuals approached gardening in varied ways and across cases I did not find clear patterning to the meanings that were attached to gardening. There was, for example, no very compelling association between gender, class background, or ethnicity, and any particular meaning. Nor were there any meanings which were generally associated with particular styles of gardening or with garden ownership. However, there were patterns *within* lives which were sometimes quite striking and which seemed to be a source of continuity within those lives.

Within individual accounts of gardening certain themes are brought to the foreground whilst others are clearly identifiable but remain in the background. The foregrounding of particular themes may indicate that certain themes have developed ongoing significance for the individual and may be a way that people meet ongoing identity needs. So Mike, for example, brings the theme of ‘escape’ to the fore and talks about the sanctuary provided by his garden and of his conscious desire to make his garden more conducive to this purpose,

“It has got to feel safe, welcoming, warm and organised...” (Mike)

For Mike this theme represents continuity and arguably stability; his chief memory of his childhood garden was that a private space within it provided an opportunity to find solitude and escape from the disorder of his flat with thirty-two cats and several dogs, and in adulthood he seems to be seeking to re-create a space which provides a similar feeling of containment,

“...there is something incredibly important for me to create – a warm cosy environment and I suppose all my friends say that that’s what I always do” (Mike)

Mike talks about the aesthetic appeal of his garden and of the fun he gets from some aspects of gardening but these are not given emphasis in his account in the same way that *escape and sanctuary* are stressed. Clive in contrast, though he speaks about the peacefulness of his garden and the escape it can offer, dwells much more consistently on the beauty of individual plants - on their form and colour - and again this represented continuity with childhood when his interest had been sparked by the beauty of one particular plant in the market.

For both Gerald and Andrew the theme of taking control, and assuming responsibility was evident as a theme at the forefront of accounts of gardening in both childhood and adulthood. For Alex one of the themes in the foreground of his childhood garden was ‘competition’ and this is still very obviously a major part of the attraction of his adult squatted allotment.

Dionne concentrates her efforts on growing things to eat; from her very earliest experiences in the Caribbean, gardening has been about provision and enjoyment of food, and this same theme is threaded throughout her account, indeed during the interview several times she got up to fetch me samples of plants she had grown - herbs to try, spices to smell and fruits to taste - the cultural continuities in her story readily apparent.

Even for people like Roger, who had described his gardening in early adulthood as ‘a chore’, there was continuity across his story. At all life stages he had continued to grapple with the chore and it seems as if ‘being willing to embrace the chore’ is, in itself, a very important part of some people’s identity. In his early seventies he was still describing gardening as something that he ‘didn’t get a kick out of’. Despite such declarations, he had just spent several years working on a gardening project on a truly grand scale, and had of course agreed to be interviewed (with some very mild protestation) as a keen gardener,

“It actually was a full-time job for a couple of years. And now, I suppose I actually spend the best part of a day, at least, a week, doing something in it. But it’s just manual labour really, I’m not nurturing anything...” (Roger)

It did not seem as if there was any theme identified in childhood which could not be at the forefront of an individual account in adulthood. This suggests that no single meaning of gardening dominates; any meaning can prevail for an individual and the patterning seems to reflect a complex set of influences: individual personality traits, chance influences, past family histories, economic and cultural factors, and broader social and historical forces, all seemed to have played a role in influencing which aspect, or aspects of gardening predominate in any one account.

The ‘forgiving’ nature of gardening supports identity processes

The interview with Roger in particular, helped to shed light on one of the reasons why gardening may be very well suited to supporting the development and maintenance of identity. I am specifically thinking here about people’s perceptions of gardening as ‘forgiving’. Like some of the younger gardeners quoted above, there was resistance all through Roger’s interview about calling himself a gardener, and he constantly downplayed his skills,

“I’ve surprised myself a little bit. But I...the motivation was I wanted it done, and the only way I could get it done was to get on and do it. And seeing it grow, come to life, was partly the inspiration to that effect. And I keep thinking to myself I ought to take an interest in plants and how you get things to grow on soil, but they seem to do very well without my help, so I let them get on with it.” (Roger)

The last sentence may be crucial in understanding Roger’s reluctance to be called ‘a gardener’ despite all outward appearances to the contrary, and despite the fact that he is willing to concede that he has created a space from which he derives immense satisfaction,

“Well, coming down here and reading the paper in the morning or something like that is - well, I was going to say heaven on earth”
(Roger)

Roger clearly does not enjoy all the processes of gardening and recognises that his knowledge is limited; he feels self conscious about accepting the label of gardener and suggests nature deserves the credit for the garden not him. This was a sentiment echoed by several of the gardeners. Nature was seen in benign terms, and gardens were perceived as forgiving places where mistakes could be made without too many consequences, where trial and error could produce positive results, where serendipity was prized, and nature was ultimately always going to assert itself. The notion of gardening as controlling nature was, for some, a mistaken idea and perhaps welcome as that,

*“Perhaps you are **less** in control... you have the control of choice, what to put in, but you have no idea what it is going to do, how big it is going to get, how well it is going to thrive or not. So I think it is*

good for me in that sense, because I like to be in control of everything.” (Grace)

No one spelt it out in specific terms but I was left with a strong impression that one of the continuities from childhood through to adulthood was that the garden continued to be perceived as something of a playground and this brought with it a sense of freedom and playfulness which is, arguably, particularly conducive to identity work with its inherent uncertainties. Gardens were places where, without too much cost, people felt free to experiment with their creativity and expressions of self, and I pick up this point in the discussion below.

Families and gardens: a change to the profile

Once people had re-engaged with gardening they seemed to stick with it, with individual levels of interest and activity seemingly remaining fairly constant in line with their other commitments, and the scope their patch, or their mode of gardening, offered. There was however a noticeable change to the profile of gardening if people became parents. That prompted a time when the interests of the family were given priority over individual aspirations for the garden; however keen the gardener had been before there seemed to be willingness to compromise so that the needs of new members of the family could be integrated,

“... when we moved to the house he was about 18 months old and I was pregnant again, and oh grass, massive expanse of grass and then I was brought up with dogs and always said “We must have a dog, must have a dog” ...so Sally [the dog] came along and Andrew and Sally played in the garden, we had rabbits, ... and cats and all sorts so the garden is a haven for all - play, relaxing - I just think it’s wonderful to be outside.” (Kath)

“...and we put up with it with the children growing up and I don’t think I’d ever make a big thing of a garden while children are riding bikes ...”(Roger)

“I think the main thing about that was that I could have a vegetable patch, but there was lawn and areas that the children could play out in. I think I always see the garden as being partly productive, partly something nice to look at, and for six months of the year an extra living space.” (Robert)

Even adult children who still lived at home were accommodated,

“No, he doesn’t do any gardening and I have to put up with him wrecking that bit around there. Although he is supposed to be very good at basketball, that ball has a mind of his own at some times.”
(Frances)

The family growing up and leaving home, alongside retirement from paid employment, both marked times of intensification of gardening activity. I am not going to discuss these in any depth here, but will be looking at gardening in relation to life events and old age in the next two chapters.

Summary of the chapter

This chapter first highlighted the varied ways in which people return to gardening after the hiatus of adolescence and early adulthood. For a small minority gardening was taken on out of a sense of duty, a task that needed doing, an acceptance of responsibility, but with little enthusiasm for the task. For the majority the prompt was entering the life stage concerned with ‘settling down’; a move to more permanent housing with access to a garden, particularly if the property was owned rather than rented, seemed to add impetus. Gardening itself was generally welcomed by these individuals as a clear marker of adult status. However some people grappled with the label ‘gardener’, and sought ways of gardening that sat comfortably with their perception of self, and their lifestyle choices and desires. Accounts of becoming a gardener felt very ‘self-conscious’ and gardening, through the many choices it offered, provided opportunities for expressing, developing or maintaining personal identity. Sometimes gardening was drawn on to resist threats which could undermine a person’s sense of self. Gardening could be approached in a playful way and permitted experimentation and mistake making; these dimensions, arguably make gardening a particularly useful resource in identity work.

The chapter has not been able to report in depth all the meanings emerging from the interviews, but these have been captured in Table 3. Other than ‘identity’, no particular theme or meaning took precedence over any other but what was apparent was the foregrounding of certain themes within individual lives, suggesting that, for those individuals, certain aspects of gardening were drawn on repeatedly, over time, to meet specific needs of the individual. This

foregrounding arguably represented continuity within individual lives and as such supported identity.

Discussion

Few accounts of gardening take a life course or life span approach; usually they take a cross sectional design. That approach will uncover the 'goods' that gardening can deliver, such as opportunities for escape, opportunities for exercising control, or the chance to connect with nature, but, whilst these goods are important, I suggest such accounts risk missing or underestimating the dynamic nature of the relationship between gardener and garden. By focussing on the life course, and in particular transition periods, it has been easier to identify and explore the processual elements of the relationship.

In the adult accounts many of the meanings of gardens were not so very different to those encountered in the recollections of childhood gardens. A comparison of tables 2 and 3 illustrates that there was considerable overlap. There were some differences, however, and particularly noticeable was the difference between children and adults in 'closeness' to the garden – the accounts of childhood gardens emphasised the closeness of the child to the materials of the garden. Their accounts gave an impression of the child in intimate relationship with the plants, soil and stones - sniffing, probing, tunnelling into them - in other words, examining the varied aspects of the garden to find out more about its qualities, scope and extent. This type of 'closeness' is far less apparent in the accounts people gave of gardening in adulthood. There is a distance in the adult accounts between the person and the garden; the person can stand back and look at the garden, treat the garden and gardening as an idea, and ask, 'what does it say about 'me'?' There is self-consciousness. Gardening in adulthood, seems to be very closely connected to issues of identity and never does this seem more apparent than in the transitional period when someone is taking up gardening for the first time in adulthood.

Becoming a gardener in adulthood seems to be a two-fold process; there is the taking on of the task and there is the acceptance of the label 'gardener'. For most people, the two seemed to have happened together and there was no

apparent tension between the two elements but for others there was a disjuncture. By considering the task and the label separately it has been possible to see different identity related influences at play. As I said, these were particularly notable at times of transition to becoming a gardener but for some, like Alex and Roger, were apparent throughout their story.

Identity: its nature and gardening as a resource to support identity

Identity is a complex phenomenon and there are multiple perspectives on it. Kroger (2007) identifies psychosocial, structural stage, historical, socio-cultural, and narrative approaches. Despite their differences all these approaches are, Kroger argues, rooted in concepts developed by Erikson (1959, 1963, 1968). Erikson's model conceptualises 'a changing individual operating in a changing society' (Sugarman, 1986 p84) and proposes predictable stages in development, across the life span, when the individual will need to adapt to new demands and expectations placed on him or her - demands which arise from a combination of biological, psychological, and socio-cultural imperatives (Erikson, 1963, Erikson, 1968). Erikson envisaged each stage as being centred on a 'crisis' when specific psycho-social tasks required resolution before the next stage could be successfully negotiated. He identified three stages in adulthood. I am not going to look at these in any depth but simply want to highlight the particular nature of the psychosocial tasks that Erikson believed were at the heart of these stages. These were 'Intimacy versus Isolation', the task associated with young adulthood, and in particular the forming of intimate adult relationships, when an individual having fought to become a person separate from his or her parents, gives up some of that individuality by taking the risk of fusing their identity with someone else, as part of a couple (Sugarman, 1986). As Sugarman (1986 p88) underlines, 'in order to take such a risk the individual must have some confidence that his or her ego will remain intact'. 'Generativity versus Stagnation', the task of middle adulthood, involves turning attention away from concerns of self, towards the next generation. It is associated with willingness to care, not just through parenthood, but through all modes of creative concern. The final crisis of adulthood is that of 'Integrity Versus Despair', the task Erikson identified as the principal one of old age, when an individual, facing the decline of their biological capacities and the

approaching end of life, must integrate their experiences of life and work towards an acceptance of what has been.

In general terms, as an individual identity develops it needs to be able to provide a sense of continuity and stability. It needs to remain the same over time so that the person has a sense that this is 'me' - a unique individual with a set of personal characteristics and dispositions - but it also needs to be able to change and adapt so that the individual can meet new demands and take on new roles, whilst still retaining a sense of coherence, a sense of being the same person. These demands arise both from predictable sources, such as the ageing process, and more unpredictable sources brought about by the twists and turns of fate. However self is not simply an intra-psychic phenomenon. It is worked out within a context, and at various levels: self, within family and friendship groups, within generational cohort, within ethnic and cultural context, and within historical context (Kroger, 2007). These contexts directly provide identity influences but also act as a mirror which reflects back and confirms for the individual a picture of themselves through other people's eyes. Josselson (1994 p82) captures this well,

'...identity is at its core psychosocial: self and other; inner and outer; being and doing; expression of self for, with, against, or despite; but certainly in response to others.'

So how does gardening relate to identity? Some accounts of gardening might imply that this is a somewhat simplistic matter – gardens are seen as expressions of the personalities and the status of the gardener - flamboyant gardens for extroverts and neat and tidy gardens for more controlled individuals. Within these accounts the garden is depicted simply as an expression or reflection of a person's identity which is portrayed in somewhat static terms as something ready formed and established. The evidence in this study suggests that identity can seldom be seen in these terms and that there is a far more complex and nuanced relationship between gardening and identity.

Taking on the tasks of gardening seemed to denote to people that they were adopting the mantle of adulthood – it was a marker - they were adopting responsibility for something outside of themselves; a marker in personal terms

but also a signal to the broader social sphere, of the family, peers, neighbours and the local community, that the individual was at a particular stage of life. It was about meeting the social expectations of the adult role, taking on the responsibilities – as Mike put it, becoming ‘a person in my own right’. At the same time this meant that some of the rewards of gaining adult status, such as autonomy and choice, became available. Gardening permits, in fact requires, an extraordinarily large range of choices, summed up in Figure 2, below. It can be seen that these choices have dimensions to them which have implications for the individual beyond the garden.

Figure 2: Gardening choices and associated dimensions

Gardening choices	Some key dimensions
Choice and placement of plants and landscaping	Aesthetic/Creative/Nurturing
Organic / non-organic Methods of Predator control Choices for hard landscaping Peat / peat-free	Ethical
High maintenance / low maintenance	Industry
Easy to grow / specialist needs	Mastery
Perennials / annuals Container-grown / from seed Trees	Temporality
Wild / natural	Control Ecological
Vegetables / flowers Family Car parking	Utility Self-sufficiency
Mode of gardening: private/community Boundaries of garden Front/rear garden focus	Public / Private

With each choice made, a further layer can be added to the adult identity: ‘I am not just an adult who gardens but also a family man’, ‘a gardener, but also someone who cares about the environment’, ‘a gardener, but also someone who

is self-sufficient'. By changing the response to the choices over time changes in identity can be incorporated and signified. Some of the choices, such as lawn or no lawn, will be 'out there' observable to all, whilst others choices, such as whether peat is used and whether slugs and snails are killed, will be more hidden; gardening is always personal and social and both spheres are essential components for identity development and maintenance.

My analysis suggests that, through the choices made in relation to gardening, people could express their identity as an individual, and at the same time reconcile different demands made on their sense of identity. So Alex can demonstrate that he is, on the one hand a conventional family man of certain status, able to provide and care for his family garden (and by implication his family). But he is also, on the other hand, able to distance himself from what are, in his eyes, the more negative connotations of that identity, by asserting his other alternative self - a rebellious figure, defiant of authority and class expectations - through his gardening of the 'squatted allotment without rules'. These varied modes of gardening permit these two aspects of Alex to sit side by side, to be reconciled, without apparent tension, to support his sense of himself as a unique individual. Alex is uncomfortable with accepting the label 'gardener', perhaps because it tends to be associated, in everyday discourse, only with the first element of his identity and does not therefore fit with an important aspect of how he sees himself and how he wants to be defined by others.

Andrew has adopted the term gardener but qualified it by introducing the adjective 'guerrilla'. I would suggest that inherent in both men's adoption of the position of 'rebel' is an appreciation that it is safe to challenge authority in this way because gardening carries a value of 'goodness' which overrides the more negative connotations which may be part of the identity of rebel. Although in both these cases a similar 'snatched' mode of gardening is being utilised to resist challenges affecting the person's sense of self, the specific identity outcome does not directly relate to the mode of gardening but lies in the dynamic interplay between the characteristics of the individual, the context, the qualities of gardening, and the responses of others.

I highlighted the way that in some accounts certain themes were privileged over others and brought to the fore, and that these themes bring coherence and continuity to the gardening stories. I suggested that this might have been important for individual identity development and maintenance. It is important to recognise the possibility that the foregrounding of themes within lives could be a narrative device – ‘this is the story I want to tell you about the kind of person I am’ – rather than a reflection of the person’s ‘real’ gardening story. This could well be the case, but may still be important for identity, as McAdams (1988) argues,

‘We create stories, and we live according to narrative assumptions...As the story evolves and our identity takes form, we come to live the story as we write it...’

Many of the accounts indicate how the identity of the person as a unique individual can be supported, ‘a person in my own right’, as Mike phrased it, through development of feelings of agency, mastery, through the ‘doing’. This is only a partial picture of identity. The other component is what Josselson (1994 p82) describes as the relational context, ‘being with’, and within this she identifies a number of dimensions which include: ‘holding’, ‘eye-to-eye validation’, ‘embeddedness’, ‘tending’ and ‘mutuality and resonance’. I will look at these in turn as they appear to be useful concepts which can bring into focus some of the specific ways gardening is drawn on to develop and maintain a sense of identity.

Josselson describes ‘holding’, the sense of security gained from the feeling of being held, feeling arms around one, as one aspect of ‘being with’. At an early stage in life this ‘holding’ will be literal and only when the child has developed certainty in the feeling of protection, does it become possible for the child to venture forth independently. In later years she suggests the need to feel held continues but may be met through symbolic holding. Mike talks about his constant drive to make a garden that provides a sense of containment and security and it was this notion, threaded through his gardening story, that gave it its continuity. Given the rather chaotic childhood that Mike had described it is perhaps not surprising that he might seek this sense of security from his garden.

It was also apparent that some people created boundaries around their gardens which were particularly dominant and far more than was required to secure privacy. It is speculative, but seems not unreasonable to suggest, that these boundaries might have a symbolic 'holding' function for the individuals concerned.

By 'eye to eye validation' Josselson (1994 p94) is suggesting that 'by becoming real to another we become real to ourselves'. I have already touched upon this concept when talking about how Andrew needed to feel validated by the reaction of his friends to where he lived. Others seemed to meet it through being asked to open their gardens to the public (Diana), through receiving unsolicited praise for their garden (Kath), or through success in gardening competitions (Leona).

'Embeddness' is a useful concept for capturing some of the ways in which gardening helped support feelings of being an individual within a broader group. Dionne struggled with feelings of exclusion and alienation from the broader society in the UK and gardening gave her one way to manage this. For her, growing the 'flavours' she knew from her childhood strengthened her sense of embeddedness in the culture of her birth and allowed her to say 'this is where I come from', thus anchoring her identity. Through growing plants which had the 'proper' flavour she was able to assert her values, and offer resistance to those who threatened them. By choosing to grow vegetables and not flowers Ellie is embedding herself with her cohort peers rather than with another generational group. By working his squatted allotment Alex is strengthening his feelings of being embedded in a community of like minded, anti-establishment individuals. As well as being embedded within broader societal groups, gardening also permitted people to feel embedded within the natural world and I will look at this more closely in subsequent chapters.

'Tending' is clearly important in relation to gardening and identity. Both Leona and Dionne, amongst many others, spoke of the importance of being able to give plants the optimum conditions for growth; there was in their accounts a sense of pride in meeting the needs of their gardens. However it was not only

about tending the garden itself. For several people the garden meant they could also tend to the needs of their growing families; by providing play space, and opportunities for engagement with different elements of the natural world, they could be good parents. This involved lowering their own aspirations and allowing the needs of the next generation to become paramount, an example of Erikson's notion of generativity. Josselson suggests that for many people, and she suggests for women in particular, identity is often rooted in people's 'complex connections to others' and in the efforts to sustain and enhance those relationships (1994 p101).

A final dimension identified by Josselson was 'mutuality and resonance', she writes,

'Affective mutuality provides a necessary sense of vitality that mitigates existential aloneness. It is this sense of "us", a participation in the space between a "you" and a "me" that connects us in a deeper and richer sense of our existence.' (Josselson, 1994 p97)

Here, Alex came to mind with his comments about digging his allotment, alongside a few mates, wanting nothing from each other, other than to ask 'how is your veggie doing?', and similarly Andrew sharing the guerrilla gardening in easy comfort with others who had turned out to take on the task. In both cases, there was a sense that simply being alongside like-minded people strengthened the meaning of these gardening episodes for the individuals concerned. Many couples also approached their gardening in this way, particularly when they were setting up home and building the garden together.

This chapter has shown how gardening can be a resource that allows people to develop, define and give outward expression to their individuality and uniqueness, even at times allowing them to reconcile quite contradictory identity needs. Gardening permits playfulness and experimentation with identity because it is perceived as being forgiving of mistakes. Gardening can support people's attempts to maintain a positive sense of self-worth in the face of threats to their self-image and to resist messages perceived in negative terms about themselves or the broader groups with which they identify. Gardening can strengthen a positive sense of personal identity by supporting self-esteem. The

accounts were dynamic and about process. They showed gardening being actively utilised in support of identity, not merely mirroring it back to the world. The gardeners' stories highlighted aspects of gardening which made it such a useful resource. I would suggest that the options and choices that it offers to and, indeed, confronts the gardener with, make it a flexible and rich resource which can be moulded and adapted to meet diverse identity needs.

Identity is particularly threatened by major life events which not only bring enormous practical and emotional challenges but also disrupt a person's sense of continuity and raise questions about their role, and their purpose. The next chapter looks at gardening in relation to such events.

Chapter 6

Gardening and Life Events

‘A rich harvest’

It was clear from the interviews that a number of the gardeners had identified a peak in their gardening activity at the time of a major life change or life event. This was apparent in over half of the cases. The events ranged from bereavement, marital and family breakdown, illness of self, and illness of family members, to adapting to civilian life after leaving the army. Bereavement was mentioned most often and some people mentioned more than one life event. The evidence presented in this chapter is taken from these cases and from the parts of the interviews where they were specifically talking about gardening in relation to the life events. It is augmented by some quotes from the autobiographical writing also in relation to life changes and events.

Increased motivation to garden

The motivation to garden at these times was experienced strongly, and sometimes with quite overwhelming urgency. For one or two people this was a moment that they could specify as the beginning of their real passion for gardening. Mike, for example, described how his motivation towards gardening suddenly took on a changed character on the long drive back to his own home following his mother’s funeral. To break the journey he stopped off at a garden centre,

*“...so there was strange stuff going on in that garden centre and I don’t really know, but I ended up buying about 5 or 6 plants – which I packed into the car and took back and there was a very important moment for me in going into the garden when I got back that evening – it was early evening – it was actually in the middle of the summer – it was July 14th – where it was **very important** [his emphasis] for me to plant those plants.” (Mike)*

Bardsley describes her desire to garden, in the face of the illness of her husband,

‘[it] felt almost atavistic: as if I were planting myself in the soil, rooting myself in, so that I, at least, would not be swept away by the storm of suffering that had blown into my life.’ (Bardsley, 2007 p3)

And Trish described her compulsion to garden as something almost instinctive,

“And when I lost my mum I had to be out there, literally, with my hands in the earth...” (Trish)

Sometimes people turned to gardening at such times in a more knowing way, with a prior awareness that it might bring some relief,

“I would go potty if I hadn’t got this, I really would. It is part of my life now. When Rick was so ill I used to come out here when moments were bad. I thought – I must recover, I will go in the garden.” (Celia)

‘Nothing soothes my agitated spirit more than clean air, rich soil and fresh flowers. Any threat of trouble, or chaos of any kind, and I start to scrabble around in the dirt, trying to make something lovely out of an ugly omen. Nothing in my life had felt uglier than Tim’s cancer diagnosis in 1994’ (Bardsley, 2007 p19)

The garden could play a role as a place – people were not necessarily actively gardening - just being in the garden could be important, as Lou described, after being diagnosed with breast cancer,

“And yes, I was probably thirty seven, thirty eight, when I was diagnosed with it. And by that time, obviously, it was pretty dreadful, really. So I went through a lot of treatment, which was quite alienating, as you can appreciate. So the garden became fundamental really... Well, I basically, almost, moved into the garden really...” (Lou)

There were references to the fact that the garden was experienced in a different way to the house,

“Because, if you sit indoors and listen to music, or read a book or whatever, that is the kind of solitude that is disconnected. I feel you may as well be in a prison. Not that I don’t like it. I love sitting indoors and listening to music or reading a book... Out there the solitude is peace. In here it is just rest and quiet. Out there it is actual peace. You can hear the birds now, even with the factory making a noise. The birds are still twittering.” (Trish)

One person suggested that she was able to think with greater clarity when in the garden, because, for her, the house held too many memories and reminders and

she needed to be away from these, in a less emotionally charged atmosphere, in order to think things through in a more rational way,

'Oh you get depressed sitting in the house, out there you don't. Because you can go out there and be more logical than you can in here, I think. Because in our living room we've got photographs of the children, the grandchildren...' (Kath)

Amplified feelings towards gardens and gardening

The meanings people attributed to their gardens, at these times of personal crisis, were not new meanings necessarily – they may have mentioned them in relation to other periods in their gardening story – and I may have referred to them in earlier sections but, rather, it seemed as if they were drawing on these meanings and their gardens with heightened awareness and appreciation of them; it was as if the garden had greater potency at these times.

'It had a greater impact at the time. Well, it wasn't that it was a greater impact, it was just more profound for me, I suppose.' (Lou)

'I can't imagine myself being at that point in my life without some kind of garden even if it had been quite a lot smaller.' (Diana referring to her marriage breakdown)

Garden meanings and life events

Gardening and gardens were seen as meaningful in a variety of ways but I have resisted thinking and writing about these meanings under discrete headings as they are all so inter-woven and it is really through their synthesis that they take on their fullest meaning. For this reason I am going to present them here in a narrative style. However, I have to start somewhere so will begin with one of the strongest themes in terms of the number of times it was mentioned, and as I illustrate that theme, others will gradually emerge. I will summarise and differentiate the themes at the end of the section before moving to a discussion about their significance for well-being, considering them from a range of theoretical perspectives.

Several people made references which were captured under the general heading of 'gardening as a sign of futurity'. For some of the people who had experienced a major bereavement, the emphasis was on the feelings, sometimes very

uncomfortable feelings, engendered by the observation that life was continuing for the plants in their gardens, *they* were blooming, quite regardless of the changes in the life of the gardener. These gardeners, were being confronted with the reality of their own situation, through the painful contrast between life continuing and life ceasing,

*'And life is going on. There is **something** out there ...But by September there was a lot of stuff coming up, autumn bulbs coming up and stuff coming up. And it just felt to me like it was weird, I don't know, it was coming up even though mum was not here.'*
(Trish)

Robert gave a very clear picture of this confrontation between continuity and change, and the bittersweet nature of gardening, after his wife died,

'I think it probably was a great help, in that, in the sense it is something that carries on. But it was also slightly odd, in that over all the years that I've been gardening ..., if we were growing vegetables it was growing them for both of us...and particularly flowers, so sowing sweet peas, for example, I wouldn't be growing them for me, I'd be growing them for Jan. And one of the things that came across very strongly, I was down the garden, and I thought – is there any point in me sowing flowers? Because I haven't got a lady to - you know - Jan isn't there to grow the flowers for. And I still did...but the feeling was very, very, different, not having Jan to grow flowers for. Conscious that I'd be sowing vegetables and she wouldn't be there to eat them. But I think it was incredibly helpful in the sense of, I think it would have been a lot harder if I'd have been, in a sense, locked up in the house and not able to get out and so on'. (Robert)

Derek Jarman gives perhaps the most evocative expression to this idea of the garden as a place where profound contrasts could be experienced as bittersweet. He describes his constant battles with the elements and the sea itself encroaching onto his beloved and beautiful garden created on the shoreline. He had made beds edged with bricks salvaged from the sea, guarding his flowers like 'dragon's teeth'. In a poem he reflects both on his own battle with AIDS and his garden's battle with the elements, always threatening to sweep it away,

*'Here at the sea's edge
I have planted my dragon-toothed garden
to defend the porch,
steadfast warriors*

*against those who protest their impropriety
even to the end of the world.
A fathomless lethargy has swallowed me,
great waves of doubt broken me,
all my thoughts washed away.
The storms have blown salt tears,
burning my garden,
Gethsemane and Eden.'*

(Jarman, 1995 p82)

Sometimes bereavement brought a realisation to someone that they had moved to a new position in the life cycle, moved up a generation, and this focused them on their own stake in the future, and gardening took on new significance,

'...and I was planting them on a very important day – [the day of his mother's funeral] - and then on talking it through and rethinking it through, you know - creating something - perhaps a shift from being the offspring of something to now producing something that is growing – new life out of death.' (Mike)

Along with this idea of new life there comes a sense of new responsibilities,

'...And I'm growing these as one of the first acts as 'me' on my own as a person.' (Mike)

For others, in contrast, it was not about planning for, and imagining, a future with them in it, but planning for a future going on without them, as the next quote illustrates. Lou had been diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer,

'Because I could do very little, because I had no energy, but I could plan. And I found that a very positive thing to do. Because it was like planning for the future, which was something that was difficult to do... And I used to basically sit under the tree, on a sun bed, and plan what I was going to do with this garden. And I remember thinking – I'll have this, I'll have that. I'll plant this, I'll plant that. And I do distinctly remember thinking – I might not see this grow... And what you plant ... it is almost like, as if - it is almost like you have the ability to see into the future. Because you know, basically, what it is going to look like. You know, when you plant something, you know what it is going to look like in five years' time. And therefore - it is almost like seeing into the future. Oh, I know what this is going to look like. It is a bit of future gazing, I suppose. And it was nice being able to make an impact on something, that, again, later on, was going to be viewed by lots of different people.' (Lou)

Gardening planning was something that Lou could do – it was easy - in contrast to all the things she could not do. Several people told me that gardening, whether planning or actual gardening, was something they found easy to do when they were under stress; it could be done without too much concentration,

'And looking back it probably meant that it gave me things to do that I was used to doing, in a very relaxing environment...It was a distraction, it was a bit of continuity as well.' (Robert)

'When my husband died I lost patience with a lot of things. I used to do a lot of dressmaking and embroidery and craftwork and I think you can't concentrate; you have that period when concentration has gone. The mind is all over, isn't it? ... Gardening is mindless, isn't it? You can just potter along' (Frances)

In Lou's case, though planning was without effort, it seems nevertheless to have provided real structure to her days, and offered a sense of purpose. It was also a creative and aesthetically pleasing activity in the face of the destruction of her physical self. Planning a garden, as long as there is someone who can act on those plans, is something that can change the future, make an impact on the world, quite regardless of whether the person is there to see it. For Lou it represented a sense of continuity, and at one point in the interview she laughed as she told me that she had even put some plants into the plan that she knew her husband really disliked. She felt it would be like teasing and testing him in the future, would he risk removing them? More than this, however, planning the garden confirmed her very existence,

'Oh yes, and it was very definitely to do with that illness and wanting to make a mark. Like, I'd made some footprint.' (Lou)

In a somewhat similar vein, Frances, a mother, widowed in her thirties, says,

'...it wasn't just to make the garden presentable after that. It became a real thing with me, to build the garden, to make a stamp on a garden and say it was mine.' (Frances)

For Frances the nature of her involvement with gardening changed and intensified after the death of her husband, and this very much echoed Mike's account of gardening after the death of his mother. It was not sufficiently satisfying merely to garden as Frances, like Lou and Mike, needed to stamp her

own mark on the ground, perhaps as a way of making herself feel anchored to something permanent.

Not everyone who was bereaved identified gardening in such terms; for Clive, it was simply about assuming responsibility,

'Well, when I came out the forces my father died almost immediately ... Yes, my father died, so there was nobody to do the garden, my mother was working as well, and my sister lived here as well, because they were bombed out, and my mother had one half of the garden and my sister the other, they sort of divided it. And down the end, as I say, there was the Anderson shelter. Then my sister moved ten doors away, and eventually I took over doing the garden, you know'. (Clive)

This idea of taking on responsibility, of taking charge, is present in many of the accounts, often emerging for the first time in the face of major life events; Andrew for example, described how his childish attempts at gardening took on a different complexion when, though still in his early teens, he was confronted with his mother's illness,

'...we were given trowels so we had little tools. It would just be a little bit of digging around, weeding a bit. Not a great deal of responsibility – it was only when we were older, well, we took - our father didn't really enjoy mowing the lawn and didn't do it very well - so both me and my twin brother did a lot of the mowing and then my mother was ill for several years and during that period I kind of took on the garden and kept it under control.' (Andrew)

The fervour, enjoyment and sense of creativity with which Andrew worked at that time was very evident in his account, and it was possible to see how he had become absorbed in his task and perhaps distracted from the less easy aspects of his life, whilst developing a sense of progress and purpose,

'Yes, yes I tamed it – it had got quite wild – I removed lots of - some of the old broom bushes, and I built a bank and I neaten up the herbaceous borders and I put in the rows of cat mint – did a lot of weeding and feeding of the top lawn areas and made it beautifully stripy and grassy and restored some pathways, installed a sunken bath as a pond for the geese that we had – more engineering – had to build huge trenches and things , oh it was brilliant fun!.'
(Andrew)

Ken also told me how he assumed responsibility for the work in the garden when his wife became seriously ill,

'Well, I wanted to make sure it was as Linda, would have liked it. I didn't want her to say everything around us is falling down. No, it's not. Everything around us is going to get better.' (Ken)

It was apparent that managing the garden became a vital part of Ken's battle, both to support his wife and to mitigate his own struggles swinging between despair and hope,

'I saw a stage when everything was too much. I had lost interest in this, lost interest in that. But you can't. You can never, ever lose interest. No matter what you go through you have got to have the will to fight, because fighting is what it is all about isn't it?...That is what it was for, yeah. To say to her – the garden looks nice now. And she could sit out here and chat, read her book, and watch the birds coming, and the tranquillity of it all. And watch the flowers all maturing.' (Ken).

At times the struggle was too great,

'It is all very time consuming. First preoccupation is Linda, and that's it. I just threw away a huge great sack of daffodils and narcissus. I didn't have time to put them in. They just rotted in the shed. I just threw them away.' (Ken)

In her autobiographical writing Bardsley reflects on the gardens' propensity to teach about loss,

'Since I started gardening...I have regularly lost my gardens. Plants die. Pots are neglected...within its confines, it embraces not just the fullness of life, but also its empty dying notes...I am learning slowly, painfully to accept it. Nature will win. Death happens. Yet the brightness of new life, of fresh possibility, is already germinating underneath.' (Bardsley, 2007 p16)

Sarton was also sustained by her awareness of the processes of life,

'When I am alone the flowers are really seen; I can pay attention to them. They are felt as presences. Without them I would die. Why do I say that? Partly because they change before my eyes. They live and die in a few days; they keep me closely in touch with process, with growth, and also with dying. I am floated on their moments.' (Sarton, 1973 p11)

Ken was able, together with his wife, to focus on the ‘fresh possibilities’ of the next season and planning for that became a pleasant distraction, but also a reminder that the garden would carry on, that the future would be brighter and worth planning for,

‘[But] we would go up to the garden centres and plan what we were going to do. It is the sheer beauty of it. And we are fortunate, it is tranquil here, we could be out in the middle of the countryside here.’
(Ken)

Within many of these accounts it is evident that a sense of purpose and control is often accompanied by feelings of hopefulness and a sense of futurity, but at the same time the garden is continually confronting people with the difficult reality of their losses.

Taking control was not simply about imposing order but could also embody a notion of providing for - it is a two way process - and this is particularly apparent in the way Gerald (Case Study 1:Appendix VI) talks about getting his garden into shape after he came out of the army. A second excerpt from that case study is given overleaf to illustrate how the sense of control and purpose, which was developed in Gerald’s early life through his relationship to his grandfather, could be accessed through gardening, when he needed it at a later critical juncture in his life. Gerald’s story indicates that his sense of re-gaining control after leaving the army was related to the temporal nature of gardening; both in the sense of temporal as related to time and chronology, and also in the sense of temporal as related to the world, the earth. His is an account which is at once agentic (*I will try and sort this out*) but at the same time he is profoundly aware of the structuring role of the garden and the very earth itself, on his actions; he acknowledges his awareness that he cannot rush the task – he has to go at nature’s pace; whatever he does and however hard he tries, for example, he believes it will take him ten years to cultivate the soil to its optimum.

An important strand of Gerald’s story is his experience of gardening as escape; as he puts it, it was *‘a place to rest your mind’*. *Escape* emerged as an extremely strong theme, for almost all the people interviewed, and at all life stages; however it was especially notable when people talked about major life events.

Excerpt 2 from Case Study: Gerald

Gardening after the army: building on the secure foundations

Gerald's involvement with gardening waned when he was in the army, first doing his national service but later signed on as a regular soldier. He felt this was to do with having other pressures,

'When I was in the army I wasn't terribly interested because I was trying to scrabble through my life, really.'

When he left the army Gerald identified gardening as taking on new significance in his life. This was partly because by then he had a wife and son and they had moved in to a new house which needed lots of work, inside and out, but also because he felt unsettled. He seems to have had an ambivalent relationship to his army career, first serving as an infantryman and later as a parachutist with the Special Air Service; he describes it as a 'brutal career',

'...you were taught how to kill...you were taught how to do that very speedily...you knew what you were there for. There were no doubts about what you were there for'

'It is a way of life which is very short term really. You know what you do is because politicians have failed and you go and settle it for them.'

And again the realities of service were personally close,

'...a friend of mine was the first soldier killed in Korea, so we understood pretty early on...'

Yet despite this awareness of brutality Gerald welcomed the ordered life of the army; he knew where he stood, everything was laid out for him, he was prepared to take on responsibility and he was rapidly promoted. He describes the army as being like a family and he specifically highlights the sense of continuity,

'...that is how the British Army holds itself together, because a regiment is like a family and you have got traditions and you are taught the traditions of your regiment and the bravery, or foolhardiness, maybe, that has happened at times....on your regimental colours are the battle honours, where you practically lost the blooming regiment because forty men out of a thousand come back...but nobody forgets in the army. You see the politician and society forget...'

It is not too difficult to see the continuities between Gerald's life with his grandfather – its routines, its emphasis on taking on responsibilities, and its attention to doing the work in the garden properly, working within the rules - with his life in the army with its discipline, routines and continuities. Even more specifically, he recalls one Regimental Sergeant Major, a keen gardener,

'If he got upset by you, he would say – "Will you accept my punishment or would you prefer a charge against you?" – And you would know exactly what you'd get. You'd get a patch of lawn to mow. It was rather nice. He would say, "Cut the lawns, do the edges" or "go and weed that" and then he would come and inspect it. Rather like Grandfather would have done....it was the story of my life, from early childhood to being a young man, and thinking – this is what happens in life, if you get it wrong you will be weeding the garden. All about gardens....'

Gerald continued...

Leaving the army behind threw Gerald into a period of uncertainty and anxiety,

'everything is done to order, so you have part one orders, part two orders, and you read those everyday and they tell you what you are going to do...part two is what you personally are going to do that day. And when you come out of the army you no longer have this list of do's and don'ts in front of you and you are quite lost. You get up in the morning sometimes and you think - what am I going to do today? What am I supposed to do today?'

(Interviewer: Quite a scary feeling?)

'It is, it really is'

He found the garden offered him some respite,

'a place where you could rest, almost, a place where you could rest your mind - soldiering is a brutal career'.

The garden seems to have offered this sense of resting place not through its kemptness, calmness or restful planting but because it offered him the opportunity to impose structure and order on it,

'When I got there it was all overgrown, a terrible state, so I thought – I will try and sort this out.'

This work, he told me, could be done at his own pace, and in his own time, and in this way it offered a sense of predictability and put the control back in his hands which he contrasted with his paid employment in the building industry at that time where he could be, and often was, laid off at a moment's notice. Gardening he says, *'... took me out of the reality of life'*.

Time is an important element of gardening for Gerald. On several occasions he refers to the way gardening cannot be rushed but imposes its own disciplines on the process.

'If you work at it all the time and improve the soil by digging and weeding and all the cultivation you do, planting, it will take you ten years to get that to work...where you don't think - oh the weeds are coming up again...'

Although he was imposing order and structure on the garden it was in turn imposing these same elements back on him - if he did not follow the rules and the timescale, things simply wouldn't grow as he wanted,

'And you think – if it is growing the wrong way too much I will have to clip a little bit off and get the shape back into it – I find myself miles away from this place and think – oh next week I must get so and so done.'

Escape was conceptualised in varying ways and it was sometimes difficult to determine the difference between notions of escape and notions of peace, the two seemed almost synonymous at times, and perhaps the differences lay in the semantics rather than the experience itself.

Gerald spoke about the relief gardening gave him from a range of day-to-day pressures, *'it took me out of the reality of life'*, and this notion is also echoed in Andrew's account,

'At that time, yeah my mum was very ill and it was quite a stressful time and I think, post rationalising, but rather than be in the cut and thrust of a competitive ball game it was much more relaxing to be just pottering around on this garden watching things grow and just sort of tending it, making it look nice.' (Andrew)

Others stressed the importance of being alone - the need to escape from people - and the garden was a good place to be alone, with a purpose, but without feeling lonely,

'It was somewhere to go and work, you know, when you wanted peace and quiet, you don't want to be disturbed. I did nay want to talk to people You know how sometimes you have a need for talk and you have a need for peace and quiet, and that was when gardening became the peace and quiet for me, the recovery.'
(Frances)

Gardens, and plants, were strongly associated with achieving peace, effortlessly - *'mindless peace'*, as Frances phrased it - which could provide distraction and respite from intrusive and troubling thoughts, and the following quote from Mike suggests that simply being surrounded by plants could have a similar impact,

*'...I am no stranger to garden centres but this I kind of - go in and I probably spent about two hours in the garden centre –it was a big garden centre, a very peaceful place- half looking at the plants out of general curiosity - what's new maybe or whatever – and half because it's really , really peaceful and it was kind of a sanctuary from what I couldn't quite come to terms with – and the coming to terms was with my own ambiguous , ambivalent feelings about my mum dying – we weren't – we were very **not close** after da [he does not finish his sentence] - since I was a teenager.'* (Mike)

For some people the peace came through becoming totally absorbed in gardening and switching off all other thoughts,

'I can look at one plant for an hour, this brings me great peace. I stand motionless and stare.' (Derek Jarman 1995 p57)

'If I am weeding ...I am only thinking about the garden.' (Trish)

'Well when you go in the garden you just switch off...totally therapeutic, I think, yes and I think you can just forget – everything really - and just bury yourself in your garden – that's so great.'

(Diana)

People frequently associated feelings of relaxation and recovery with their garden,

'...when I came home, and I'd walk down the garden and there'd be a sort of instant reaction – it's green....and walking down the garden I could sort of feel the tension relax. Conversely, going into London, particularly the Underground at Victoria, its grey, there's no life there.' (Robert)

In Robert's account there is a sense of wanting to be amongst life and, like him, others also believed that feelings of peace and escape were prompted not through separation, but by the very opposite, through connection - being in contact with life in its broadest sense - and feeling that affinity,

'I was still connected. And I had to have my hands in the earth, touching things, the whole rhythm, everything was there. And I was connected but I didn't have to do anything. I didn't have to give of anything.' (Trish)

The importance of this to Trish at the time of bereavement would be difficult to exaggerate,

'And it was keeping me in the world. At that time....Yes. Keeping me alive almost, because I think ... I don't know how to describe this - I think it is to do with my soul still beating from the rhythm of life, even though I wanted to withdraw from it.' (Trish)

Though having initially described the garden in terms of escape, Trish became dissatisfied with that idea, because of the connotations escape had with *escapism*, and she summed up her feelings of going into the garden in different terms,

'No, it is going home.' (Trish)

Perhaps this feeling of being at home and also of being connected to life explained why people seldom described feeling lonely in their gardens,

'... it is quite a lonely job, I think. But for me I think that is an attraction. Most of it is lonely. On my own with the birds and things, the sounds...' (Barbara)

Barbara's Garden



"I think nature is just incredible. It is the wonder of that, I think...."

Barbara, reflecting on her motivation towards both gardening and her sculpture

This is something May Sarton has reflected upon at length; her Journal is entitled, a Journal of Solitude, and she has reached some conclusions about the things that sustain her as she grapples with recurrent depression,

'This morning I woke at four and lay awake for an hour or so in a bad state. It is raining again. I got up finally and went about the daily chores, waiting for the sense of doom to lift – and what did it was watering the house plants. Suddenly joy came back because I was fulfilling a simple need, a living one. Dusting never has this effect...whatever peace I know rests in the natural world, in feeling myself a part of it, even in a small way.' (Sarton, 1973 p16)

People's deep appreciation of the beauty of plants and gardens was often in evidence; it is almost as if some gardeners cannot resist plants and the urge to talk about, think about, and surround themselves with plants is overpowering. The smallest details are noticed and gloried in, as this extract from Derek Jarman's writing illustrates,

'The garden is fresh and green as the lanes; it is filled with the flowers of spring: some wonderful tulips: crimson and yellow with a frill, and a deep purple one which sways above the luxuriant tawny wallflowers, the first white campion, blue-eyed forget-me-nots and banks of marigolds; the Crambe cordifolia and maritima are in bud, as are the Mrs Sinkins pinks...the garden is off, the gun of spring fired. The artichoke outside my window has fourteen buds...'
(Jarman, 1995 p130)

Gardens and memories

Gardens and gardening provided opportunities for remembering and memorialising. I have already referred to the fact that Trish's positive memories of her mother were spontaneously conjured up by seeing her mother's favourite flowers re-emerging the season after her death. For Mike, planting the garden with flowers bought on the same day as his mother's funeral, clearly held significance for him, but was more difficult for him to understand, perhaps reflecting the fact that his memories of his mother were much more ambivalent and painful,

'...so there is something strange going on with this new role that the garden is taking on and I can't explain it to you any more than that but it is somehow tied into the death of my mum, to my past.' (Mike)

Other people drew on their garden as a way of holding onto their memories, in a less abstract way,

'...after Jan died, she was buried, and the temporary marker on the end of the grave, the shape of a cross, there was that, while the headstone was made, and then once the headstone was there, of course, there was the cross with the brass plate on. And so what I did, down this left hand side, I almost made like a hidden shrine, where that cross stood for twelve months, and again I think that was helpful in terms of the transition. And eventually I took it down...for a time there was that part of the garden that was in memory of Jan.'
(Robert)

Celia spoke of tending her balcony full of geraniums almost as a tribute to her late husband, who had died three year's earlier after sixty years of marriage,

'And if I feel there are some bad days, like birthdays, anniversaries, days you have to get through, as I call it, I either go up to the nursery or spend a day with a friend. It is difficult to get through, well, when you have been as long as we have; part of me has gone anyway. So I do want to look after this [her garden] as a memorial to him now, because he did love his garden.' (Celia)

Celia told me that the geraniums she was tending were decades old, they were quite literally the same plants that her husband had cared for, and the sense of a shared task and continuity was very apparent.

For Deborah one of the most important aspects of her garden was the way in which it enabled her to hold on to connections to her past and, in particular, its role in helping her feel rooted to a family network. This had always been an important aspect of her garden but she told me it had become more apparent following the death of her parents and other relatives, the emptying of her own nest as her children reached adulthood, and her sister's move to a home some distance away.

'...the year we lost my dad we also lost my aunt, my uncle, my brother-in-law lost both his parents within about two months of each other...Yes, so that was 2004 we lost all those people. And it is the thing of the generation kind of moving on, really.' (Deborah)

Deborah's whole gardening story was threaded through with references to her childhood garden which she had only really given up a few years earlier when

her father died. She talked about how rooted she felt to her childhood home, with a very strong sense of place, and how she had tried to maintain some sense of this rootedness after the house had been sold,

'I want to keep that continuity going. Yes. You saw all the grape hyacinths around the garden, and I think particularly the ones down here, my father, again, was very keen on grape hyacinths, he always had them in the garden, and some of those actually come from his garden. So I don't know which ones, they got mixed with everything else, and not only that, but my grandfather who you saw in the picture was someone who, he was very interested in gardening, and he gave my father some of those grape hyacinths. So actually they've come from him to my father, and then to me.' (Deborah)

Deborah referred to making 'mind-maps' in her garden to remind her of all her connections with family, past and present, and with familiar places where she had felt 'at home'. As Deborah showed me round her garden she constantly named plants using a familiar tone of voice almost as if she was introducing them to me as family members, and this may have been how she felt,

'I've kind of done quite a lot on the family tree, various bits, there is about, I think it's five, four generations of my father's family, was somebody called Dennis, so I had an Uncle Dennis, he had an Uncle Dennis, their father was Dennis, their father was Dennis, going right back to about eighteen hundred, so obviously when I saw a plant called Dennis, I thought oh, that goes in the garden... We've got a columbine, which again connects with my childhood memories... Yes, and that one is called Dorothy, which is my mother in law's name. So again it's all that, and I said that's a pretty flower, and it's called Dorothy, so it goes in the garden. I've had a number of fuchsias, a couple of fuchsias, called Harry, which was my father's name. I had a sweet pea last year, which I grew, called Our Harry, which I'm going to get some for my sister as well.' (Deborah)

Because Deborah's garden conjured up all her family connections she was able to say that she felt as if she hadn't really lost them on their deaths,

'...you haven't really lost them, because actually they are part of all this.' (Deborah)

There was a real sense of continuity, perhaps security, and a sense of being part of a long family story. Chiming strongly with this, Lou used an evocative phrase, 'a handshake across time' as she described her love of working on a

garden that had been designed and planted by earlier owners, making her own mark whilst trying to preserve something of the past, and knowing that the garden would be tended by others in the future. This gave her a sense of continuity and belonging even amidst the changes wrought by her major illness.

Generally gardens seemed to hold memories which were less mixed and less difficult than those associated with the house and Robert felt that the memories associated with the garden were, in general, more benign,

'...they are different. I am trying to think in what way. Um...I think in the garden, thinking back, your thoughts tend to go to pleasant summer events, of Jan being in the garden, and so on. Whereas in the house things aren't necessarily summer, and in some ways it's probably a stronger association of memories in the garden than what there is in the house.' (Robert).

One other theme emerged in the study but it was less apparent in what people said than in my own observations, particularly as people showed me their gardens. I felt the participants experienced a very real sense of pride and achievement in relation to their gardens but this usually went without verbal expression. I first became fully aware of this as I was shown around one particular garden which was not at all special in any conventional sense - its design was haphazard, it had plenty of weeds, pests were readily apparent, and its flowers were nothing unusual, neither particularly showy nor out of the ordinary - yet its owner spoke of her garden with such obvious love and pride that I realised that she saw it with quite different eyes. This was repeated several times throughout the study. These were not gardens that conformed in any objective way to ideals set out in the media, and the owners' pride lay in the relationships with their gardens which were deeply personal, subjective, intense and meaningful. There seemed little doubt that the gardens conveyed something to these people that outsiders would not be able to see, or even imagine, but which was a very real source of pride, satisfaction and also self-esteem.

Summary of chapter and themes

This chapter has shown how people often felt a spontaneous need and desire to garden in the face of major life events, and particularly life threatening illness

and bereavement. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter I have chosen to introduce the various themes in a naturalistic narrative manner rather than under discrete headings. This was done in an attempt to avoid presenting a fragmented picture of the themes. In reality they were entwined and interwoven. I have separated them out and summarised them in Table 4 (overleaf) but it is clear from this summary that many of the sub-themes and ideas associated with the themes do recur and overlap.

One of the qualities shared by the themes is their dynamic nature; within the majority there is a sense of process, with tensions, contrasts and confrontations. I would argue that this feeling of activity might be expected as these are accounts of gardening in relation to major life events which are in process of being negotiated. Some of the theoretical literature which explores the nature of coping with life events, and particularly literature on grief, loss and bereavement, has been helpful in adding to my understanding of the reasons why gardening might take on enhanced significance at such times and I look at this in more detail in the following discussion.

Table 4: Themes associated with gardening and life events

Theme	Sub-themes and associated ideas
Gardens, gardening and life events	Urgency; start of new relationship to gardening; potency with meanings enhanced at times of crisis
Temporality	Cycles within garden; growth and decay and re-growth; continuity; hopefulness; reliability; re-assurance; pressure to attend to garden's needs; nature's own pace; of the earth
Futurity	Contrast of permanence and impermanence; identity & making a mark/ leaving a footprint; having a stake in the future; becoming the next generation / taking on responsibility for the earth; continuity
Control	Being active; taking responsibility for and managing; ordering and being ordered (reciprocal process); having structure; threat and management; despair v. hope; agency v. structure; relationship to time
Escape	Peace; respite and recovery; space for reflection; distraction; avoidance of people; absorption; mindlessness; being alone yet still connected
Connections	Being part of something bigger; being connected across time; continuity in the face of change; social support
Memories	Confrontation with reality of loss; remembering; honouring; rootedness; continuity and coherence of story; benign nature of garden related memories
Nurturing/caring	Taking responsibility for; being in touch with the earth; fun and pleasure; absorption in task and distraction
Aesthetic appreciation of plants and gardens	Beauty, form, colour, celebration, joy, pleasure
Pride and satisfaction	Relational; subjective; meaningful

Discussion

Life events and gardening

The analysis has shown that people turned to gardening with intensity when they were faced by a major life event such as life limiting illness, bereavement, or divorce. Parkes (1993 p93) sees such events as psychosocial transitions, defined as events that 'require people to undertake a major revision of their assumptions about the world...lasting in their implications rather than transient...and take place over a relatively short period of time'. Such transitions are generally evaluated in negative terms and are a major threat to health and well-being, having a profound impact on many life domains, not just on the psychological but also on the physical, social and the spiritual. They may disrupt relationships, social life and roles, the normal structures of daily life, including work and leisure and they are far reaching with consequences in many areas of functioning. A sense of personal identity comes under particular threat in the face of major psychosocial transitions, and ultimately new or re-worked identities have to be forged.

The need for developing a sense of coherence and continuity in the face of shattered assumptions is core to Parkes' model (1971, and Parkes, 1993) and was obvious in many of the accounts. Robert, questioning why he is still growing flowers, is, in effect, questioning the purpose of his life now that he is no longer half of a couple. Even leaving the army was, for Gerald, something that required a major revision of his assumptions about the world, a revision that was 'scary', and as Parkes (1993 p95) puts it,

'For a long time it is necessary to take care in everything we think, say, or do; nothing can be taken for granted anymore...since we rely on having an accurate assumptive world to keep us safe, people who have lost confidence in their world model feel very unsafe.'

Many of the people interviewed were drawn to the garden whilst they were grieving. Grief has been described by Parkes as 'essentially an emotion that draws us toward something or someone that is missing' and as something that, 'arises from awareness of a discrepancy between the world as is and the world as 'should be'' (Parkes, 1993 p92). Shuchter and Zisook (1993 p30) describe

very clearly a conflict faced by the bereaved, and I would suggest this equally applies to people grieving other losses,

'The human thrust toward homeostasis places the bereaved in an enormous conflict between very powerful and opposing forces. Faced with intense emotional anguish, a primary task is to shut off such pain. On the other hand, the disruptive changes that are the psychological and material reality of the survivor demand attention. Facing reality initiates pain, which, in turn sets off a variety of mechanisms to mitigate against it...if the bereaved are fortunate, they will be able to regulate, or 'dose', the amount of feeling they can bear and divert the rest...'

This notion of stress arising from two distinct and opposing sources is captured as a central concept in Stroebe and Schut's model of bereavement coping: the dual-process model (Stroebe and Schut, 1999, Stroebe et al., 2005). This model conceives of healthy adaptive grieving as involving oscillation between two sets of stressors, one set which is loss oriented and the other restoration oriented. The model was developed as a response to some of the deficits identified in more traditional models of grieving which put 'grief work' as the central mechanism in the process (Bowlby, 1980, Worden, 1991) but which, they argue, fails to capture this, '...dynamic, fluctuating process of confrontation and avoidance of grieving'. In the loss orientation of their model the focus of the bereaved person is on grief work and the experience of the direct loss of the person is paramount with intrusion of grief, pangs of separation, and the relinquishing and re-working of the bonds to the deceased. When in loss orientation people avoid thinking about, or deny, restorative changes. Conversely when orientated towards restoration people avoid thinking about their loss but instead attend to the changes necessary in their life: do new things, distract themselves, and take on new roles, identities, and relationships. Both orientations are seen as being important for healthy grieving and oscillation between the two states is seen as beneficial, with the switching allowing grief, and the changes in reality, to be managed in small 'doses'.

Certainly some of the gardeners I interviewed, who talked about their loss, described gardens as places where they were confronted with the pain of their losses, and where they faced up to aspects of their separation, '*no one to grow flowers for anymore*', and '*it was coming up even though mum was not there*'.

Robert's Garden



"And one of the things that came across very strongly, I was down the garden, and I thought – is there any point in me sowing flowers? Because I haven't got a lady to grow flowers for..."

Robert, reflecting on the death of his wife

For Derek Jarman, in the face of his own impending death, it was his ‘Gethsemane’. At those moments the gardens were undoubtedly painful places where loss was highlighted by the very fact that life was so very palpably going on all around, despite sometimes being fragile and at the mercy of the elements. However, gardens were also places which gave great pleasure and allowed comfort, soothing and distraction; they were perceived as offering effortless, ‘mindless peace’; were places which offered respite and permitted people to avoid the pain of their loss, places which fitted with the restoration orientation of Stroebe and Schut’s model. Gardens were not only peaceful sanctuaries (Derek Jarman’s ‘Eden’) but also places that actively promoted in people a focus on the restorative demands of their situation, for example on re-gaining a sense of control and purpose, of planning, the taking on of new responsibilities, with a sense of future and a feeling of hopefulness, of life going on. As Stroebe and Schut (2005 p50) write, drawing on the work of Janoff-Bulman and Berg (1998),

‘Restoration incorporates the rebuilding of shattered assumptions about the world and one’s own place in it, just as loss orientation incorporates rebuilding of assumptions about the presence of the lost person in one’s life’

It seems as if gardens and gardening might play a key role for some people in enabling, perhaps even pushing, the oscillation between the two orientations and it is in the oscillation that Stroebe and Schut see the adaption to bereavement taking place.

‘We postulate that confrontation–avoidance alternation is a key theoretical mechanism, even the single central process in adaptive grieving’ (Stroebe et al., 2005 p52)

As discussed, the restoration orientation is about rebuilding shattered assumptions about the world and one’s place in it. The idea of rebuilding shattered assumptions was very apparent in Lou’s account of grappling with a life threatening illness. In facing her illness she describes what might be termed anticipatory grief (Lindemann, 1944, Rando, 1986, Reynolds and Botha, 2006). She had confronted the pain of her potential losses, both current and future, but

planning the garden helped her on many fronts. It gave her some structure, a task that she could physically manage and thus an element of control in an otherwise uncontrollable world; it was a distracting exercise, one she could become absorbed in, so blotting out more disturbing thoughts; it was aesthetically pleasing and creative. Lou's focus when planning the garden could be said to be compatible with Stroebe and Schut's restorative orientation and Parke's psycho-social transition model. It allowed her to begin to rebuild some shattered assumptions. In particular it enabled her to develop a new sense of her place in history, helped her see herself as having links with the past, able to make a mark on the present and to leave a legacy for the future; as she put it, she had 'made her footprint'. In her reference to gardening as like a 'handshake across time' she is able to hold on to a sense of coherence and continuity, and something similar is seen in many of the accounts. In one sense, gardening is always about planting for the future and is an exercise in trust.

The maintenance of continuity is an important element in most theoretical accounts of bereavement, or other major life events, but is core to narrative theories (Neimeyer, 2004). Narrative theories assume that people actively make and maintain their sense of identity through constructing stories which tell of who they are, where and how they fit into the social world, stories which help make sense of the choices and limitations within their broader lives. In the face of a major bereavement, the plot of the story is disrupted and narrative theories hold,

'...that human beings seek meaning in mourning and do so by struggling to construct a coherent account of their bereavement that preserves a sense of continuity with who they have been while also integrating the reality of a changed world into their conception of who they must now be.' (Neimeyer et al., 2002 p235-236)

In the case of Deborah, it was possible to see how in the face of the loss, she incorporated memories of family into her garden (her 'mind-maps') and, by doing so, was able to construct a view of herself as still embedded within a family. By continuing to nurture the very plants that they – her father and grandfather - had nurtured, she was able to demonstrate her continuing care for them. In this way Deborah and others, like Celia, Trish, and Mike, were able

to find ways of continuing their bonds of attachment (Klass et al., 1996). Even Lou, by incorporating plants her husband disliked, was setting up a continued bond with her husband. Klass, et al (1996) suggest that death does not sever the bonds of attachment as theorised in earlier accounts (for example Freud, 1917) and grieving is not about relinquishing attachments. They argue that individuals seek to find safe and appropriate ways of keeping their bonds alive so that there is coherence to the life story and that important relationships can continue to sustain even after death. People not only felt connected, through their garden, to family or friends but they also felt connected to the wider world of nature. This was a connection experienced in more spiritual terms which provided meaning and a sense of hopefulness, mitigating existential loneliness.

There were many examples of people using the garden for escape, respite and recovery and this supports the work of the Kaplans (1990, and Kaplan, 1995), and many others, who have found natural surroundings to have restorative powers. Perhaps one of the most significant attributes, mentioned by several people, was the power of the garden to completely absorb attention and in this way provide 'time out' from other concerns. Csikszentmihalyi (and Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, , 1992) has highlighted the importance of such 'flow' experiences in providing conditions so that a sense of timelessness, and freedom from feelings of worry or failure, can predominate. Francis' 'mindless peace' perhaps captures this feeling well.

By looking at gardening specifically in relation to life events it has been possible to draw out some of the ways in which gardening is utilised by people, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, at times of intense disruption to life. Gardening is drawn on for memorialising, promoting a sense of continuity, a coherent story; it is drawn on to distract, and for its capacity to offer respite and recovery. It supports feelings of connection and embeddedness and mitigates existential loneliness. It provides opportunities for future planning, gives feelings of control and structure to days where there is no longer routine. It helps people stay in touch with their capacity to nurture. It can help lift mood and bring a sense of relentless hope, even to the most despairing. I would argue that by focussing on life events the meaning of gardening in people's lives is

brought into the sharpest relief and the potency of gardening is at its most apparent. Figure 2 on the next page sets out a model which conceptualises the relationship between gardening and well-being in the face of life course change.

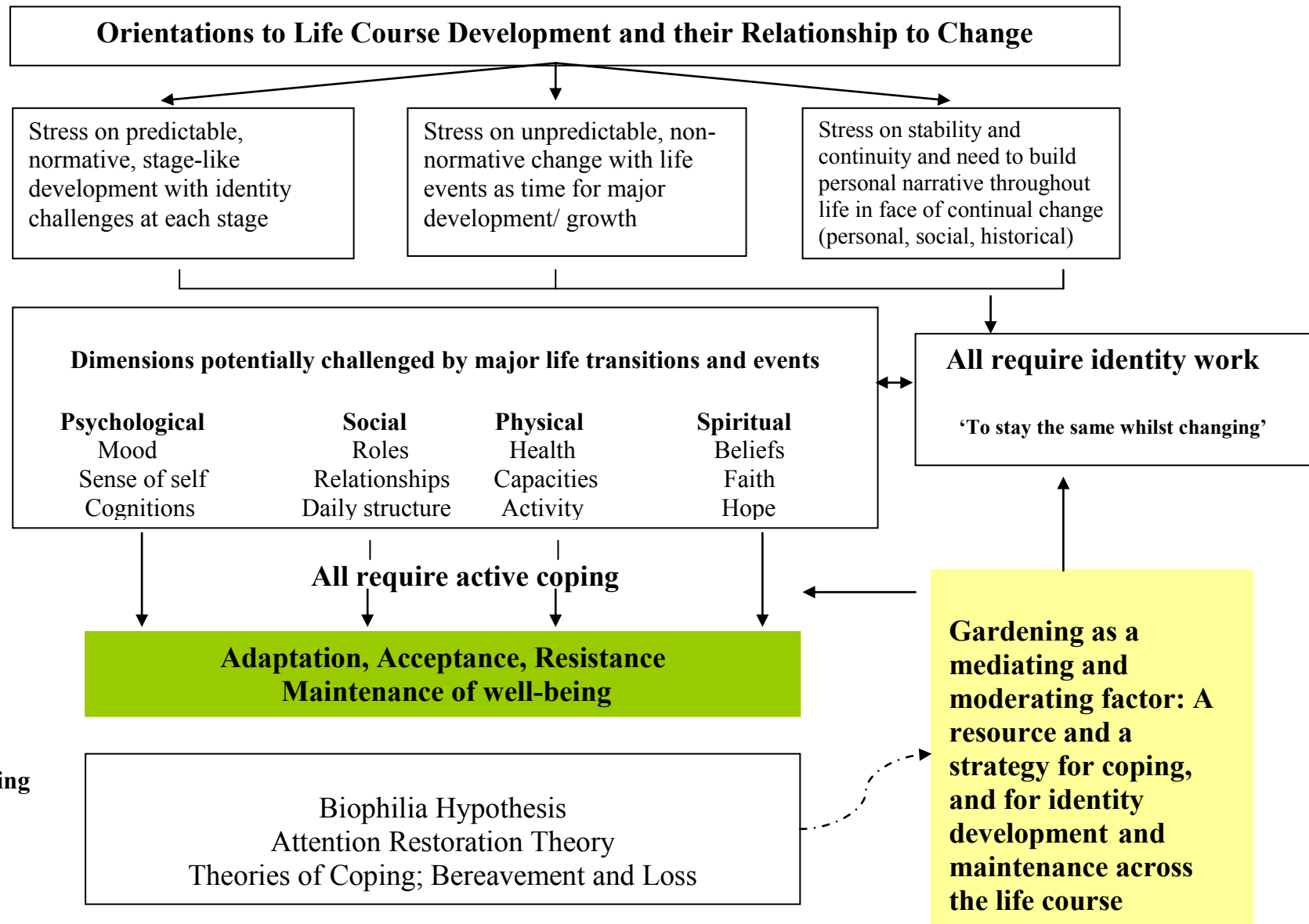


Figure 2:
Connections
Between
Gardening
And Well Being

Chapter 7

Gardening and Later Life

‘Decline and decay’

Seven of the gardeners were sixty-five years or older, and of these, four had reached very old age, being in their late eighties or nineties. In this chapter I look specifically at these older people’s experiences of gardens and gardening and I consider whether their accounts stand apart from those of younger gardeners.

In relation to younger people I discussed their struggle to embrace the notion of themselves as gardeners. In this chapter I will explore older people’s struggle to continue as gardeners, looking at the factors that drive them to persevere even when it means pain or the risk of injury and falls. In earlier chapters I talked about the role gardens and gardening played in helping people develop and sustain their identities, particularly in the face of major life transitions. Old age, and the closeness of death, brings people face-to-face with some ultimate challenges to identity and I will explore whether gardening continues to play a role in supporting and even developing identity in old age.

Most of the themes mentioned in relation to childhood and younger adult years, such as ‘escape’, ‘control’ and ‘aesthetic appreciation’ were present in the older people’s accounts but some of the meanings and understandings of gardening in old age were distinctive, and older gardeners had some things to say which had not been said by the younger gardeners. In particular, older people brought spiritual matters to the fore and, in association with that, there was a move towards what I have termed ‘unselfing’, that is, an increasing acceptance of the relative unimportance of self within the broader contexts of life. The final excerpt from Gerald’s case study is included and, with the previous excerpts, puts the themes identified within this chapter, especially control, into the context of a whole life; it also illustrates how the formative influences from childhood continued to play a part in his latter years. Table 5 (p233) summarises these themes and in this chapter I will concentrate on exploring the

more distinctive aspects of their accounts. In the discussion I use the theme of control, and specifically the concepts of primary and secondary control, to explore, whether and in which ways, the meanings attached to gardening in old age can be seen as distinctive.

Older people in their gardens

It is important not to see all the older gardeners as a homogeneous group. The youngest and the physically fittest of this group were still very active in their gardens. For some, retirement had represented freedom and provided new opportunities; Roger had embarked on a massive reshaping of his garden after his retirement,

'...time, and sort of making the decision. I suppose I was always tempted to do that, sort of thing, but never did, and then I had all the opportunities, and I went ahead and did it, yes' (Roger)

The project had taken him years, even with paid help, and had perhaps given him some of the same benefits that satisfying paid employment had previously provided: structure to his days, a sense of purpose, satisfaction from planning and executing a project, and the companionship of working alongside other people in a team effort,

'...yes, well, we had an excavator to excavate this. And we were digging the earth out, and we just hired it for two or three days, and frightened ourselves driving it. And I had already had this built, and this thing used to grab earth with it, pull it out, pulling it around, and drop it, you see. I was absolutely petrified I was going to get the wrong lever, turn around ...' (Roger)

'Well, it kept me fit [LAUGHS] I was working quite long hours on it. And they'd often want, one of them wanted to come at seven in the morning, and the other one wanted to come later, and work in the evening, so I was carrying straight through the whole lot, which I found a little bit tiring...' (Roger)

However, not all the older people were as fit and active as Roger, and for some the garden had become a mixed blessing.

The challenges of gardening in old age

Gardening in old age could not be said to be without its drawbacks, and its challenges, and for the oldest participant, Widdy, aged 94, the time had come when gardening had ceased to be an activity which she could do herself, she could only do it via the labour of others, but she firmly asserted that she remained in charge of her garden,

'I was out there overseeing what they were doing. I'm very bossy.'
(Widdy)

And she also seemed able to maintain a sense of control through visualising and planning what she wanted, and then seeing it come to life,

'I love daffodils. And I always had a spring garden, and daffodils were what I wanted. And St David's Day comes in the spring, and my husband was Welsh and I always give him daffodils on St David's Day....and that's how I visualised my garden, and now they are all in bloom, that's exactly how I saw it...I'm astonished that it's exactly as I had foreseen it.... And in my mind I'd painted this picture. And in the spring it actually came to life. To me it was a miracle.' (Widdy)

In this account there is a sense of the mutuality of the gardener working alongside nature. Widdy was dismissive about the difficulties in giving up active gardening which, for her, had happened some years previously. She suggested that nature continued to provide compensation in the garden, whereas difficulties managing in the house were more challenging,

'[In the house] there's no life. No sap rising, no sun, bringing out the colours, opening the flowers.' (Widdy)

Arthur was somewhat similar. Although he was 93 and his health was deteriorating he professed to have no real concerns about giving up gardening. Like Widdy, he took a fatalistic line and suggested that there was no point in worrying and he said he took life philosophically,

'I do what I can and leave what I can't.' (Arthur)

But even for Arthur, who was one of the most accepting of the older people, there was an awareness that some things would be difficult to accept; he had told me that he was especially proud of the tomatoes he grew,

'What will be the hardest will not being able to grow tomatoes.'
(Arthur)

The struggle to garden and why people carried on

For two of the other very old gardeners, Celia and Clive, the struggle to garden was current, apparent, and for them, extremely unsettling, a topic they frequently returned to throughout their interviews. Clive repeatedly stated that he needed to stop gardening,

'Well, of course, I do a little every day, but as I've just said to you I've got to give it up, because anything where I tug, or pull, seems to affect my nervous system. So although I do it and I shouldn't do it it's something I must cut out...But no, I mean I tried to persuade myself I wouldn't do any more gardening, because if I bend over I feel dreadful.' (Clive)

But he straightaway declared a reason - a duty - why he had to continue,

'Well, I feel I've got a duty if I've got a piece of ground... Well, I think so. I mean I fully understand, and I don't get sentimental about it, because I shan't be here. I know the next owner of the house will come and concrete the whole lot, dig up every plant I've ever planted.' (Clive)

Sometimes this duty to care for living things seemed burdensome yet compelling. Celia painted a vivid picture of the strains of gardening in old age,

'...it takes me longer to do anything, because it hurts to bend, and it takes me longer to do things, and I walk slower so it takes me longer...they grow like trees and I had to just yank them down quite a bit, and it hurt me to do it. I talked to them and I said - please don't blame me for this. I fell down and I can't look after you, not properly. But I give them tomato feed and I give them cold tea and all sorts of weird things.' (Celia)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was clear that some of the duty to care was driven by a desire to look after plants previously cared for by dead partners,

and this responsibility could weigh heavily; Celia had lost her husband three years earlier,

'It still hurts. I still miss him sitting where you are. And well, you have to just face it, I talk to my plants, and I said – if he was here, this [a dead clematis] wouldn't have happened.' (Celia)

However even these oldest gardeners seemed unable to stop planning and looking forward, and in their accounts a sense of purpose and hopefulness was apparent,

'But every time I get the catalogue through I think ooh, I like that, I think I'll have that.' (Clive)

'And as I say I've grown the beef type, and they have not done too badly as far as size, and of course the Black Russian have a lovely flavour, absolutely lovely flavour. I might do those next year, I'll see, because they are not an awful lot of trouble, I suppose.' (Clive)

Some of their ideas they directly related to media influences which are often associated with younger gardeners; the oldest gardeners were still excited by novelty and new approaches,

'It's only spring, and I've already got a list of flowers that I've watched, from gardening programmes on television, that I would like in my garden once the bulbs are finished. The gardener will cut them back..' (Widdy)

'And just out there I have decided to grow all plants that are silver or white, a white border. This is something I have read in horticultural magazines about.' (Gerald)

Throughout the interview Clive continued to come up with rationalizations for carrying on gardening despite the obvious challenges,

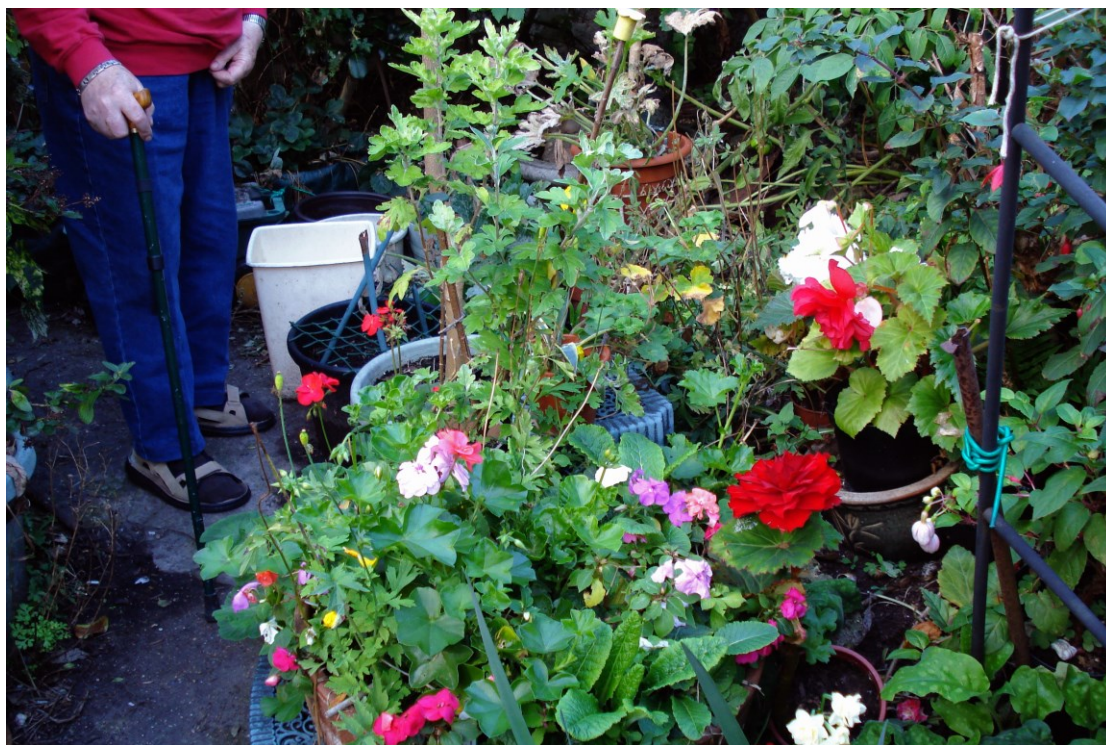
Lesley: *I thought you were going to be giving it up?*

Clive: *Well [long pause]*

Lesley: *You might as well carry on?*

Clive: *Let's face it, those grow like a weed anyway, don't they? tomato plants. And if I keep them down that end I can manage the watering better. I realised this year it was a mistake to put them up this end, because carting loads of water, I can't do it, you know.*

Clive's Garden



"...and when you see a fuchsia, I've got a lot out there which I'll show you, I mean the beauty of them overwhelms you."

Clive

Possibly the next reason that he offers helps explain the difficulty he has in giving up,

'Well it makes me realise I'm still alive... At eighty eight I do need something to tell me yes, I am still alive, if I cut myself I will bleed... I suppose the fact you can see the beauty, it will overwhelm you with it's beauty or something like that, and the fact you are growing it from a little bit of dirt.' (Clive)

Through all the experiences that gardening provides, Clive seems to find some point to his continued existence. Celia echoes this,

'My twins will be sixty next month, so I wonder what I am doing here now, sometimes. Except my garden needs me.' (Celia)

And she gave other reasons why she carried on despite the obvious difficulties,

'But it takes my mind off something I don't want to think about... it is a distraction as well as being a joy. It is always a joy first...' (Celia)

Celia expressed a strong sense of reliance on having her garden; it seemed integral to her life, playing a structuring role,

'I would go potty if I hadn't got this, I really would. It is part of my life now.' (Celia)

Younger people had often talked about having to fit gardening in, alongside other interests and activities, but on being asked what might take the place of gardening if she couldn't carry on, Celia was at a loss, and this gave a sense of the central role it played in her life,

'I shudder to think. I just hope that will never happen. I honestly don't know...' (Celia)

Unlike Clive, who did not have children and had no thoughts of his garden continuing after his death, Celia expressed an expectation, or perhaps a hope, that after her death her children would look after her garden, but even as she said this the thought changed and arguably became more grounded in reality,

'And I think I would just like to not wake up one day. I think they would care for my garden. And [as] I said, they don't want this flat, you see, when I go, and I said – don't forget to charge for the garden, because the plants are quite expensive, so don't just throw it in. A lot of hard work has gone into it. It is hard work. I think gardening is hard work. But I love it...' (Celia)

Spiritual meanings

In the last quote Celia's comments were about the material and the practical, but as the older gardeners talked they often brought up more spiritual matters,

'And I used to think – there is a God after all, because who creates the flowers? We just cultivate them. We don't design them...' (Celia)

'I am sitting there, when I get up of a morning, having a cup of tea, early in the morning, I am thinking - I have to get up, and it's difficult for me to get up out of the chair, but I have to get up and look out of the window, at my garden, and see all those daffodils and pansies. They give me so much pleasure. And then I thank God for them, and sit down again...And to be quite honest I think God deserves it, the praise for it...Because he is the creator, after all.' (Widdy)

'...it was forces beyond me made this. I can sit down and do drawings and make engineering projects work, but I can't do this and make this work. This is seasons and nature taking it's time, isn't it? ...I am not in charge of it, I am part of it. And I am making it work. Now, greater forces out there than me make it work. But it is just lovely.' (Ken)

Reflections on overtly spiritual and religious themes, and observations on creation, did not emerge in the same, very direct, way in any of the accounts of gardening given by younger people. Some of the older people acknowledged that as their lives slowed down as a result of retirement and through disability; they had more time to observe life with a fresh eye and their perspectives had changed,

'And the miracles. The more you see, the more you observe, the more you become aware of.....during your busy life you are learning about life, people. And what goes on in the world. By the time you are sixty and you retire that's when you start looking back, hindsight, and you are astonished at what you now realise you've done during your life, and what you've learnt during your life, and that's when you begin to, what they call, mellow. You get to

understand the wisdom of the world.... And that's enormous. Bows you over...' (Widdy)

For Widdy part of the wisdom of the world lay in seeing its broader connections,

'...and you stopped hating things you did once, you see the wisdom of it. Like ants... ...I looked on as a damn nuisance, I had an ants' nest, and boy oh boy, but we couldn't - the garden couldn't exist without ants, they are the dustmen of the gardens, of the earth, they get rid of all the rubbish under the earth, and they are very, very, useful. Oh, they are my treasures now, ants.' (Widdy)

Changing sense of self

There was a reduction in Widdy's sense of her own importance relative to the ants; she no longer perceived the need to have dominion over them. For Ken, the fresh look had also altered his sense of self,

'But you need the time to go and look at these things and realise how insignificant you are in your own life...' (Ken)

A thought echoed by Gerald,

'If you are a hands-on gardener and you do something with your hands, you sort of think - well that didn't work. And it puts you in your place in life...It makes you realise what an irrelevance - you assess yourself, or re-assess yourself all the time, and what your value is.' (Gerald)

Certainly none of the younger gardeners had spoken in this way about their insignificance. In fact the opposite had been the case. Some of the younger gardeners had been concerned to promote an active sense of who they were; they were concerned about lifestyle and with the kind of image they projected. This was only the case in one respect with the older gardeners and that is that they did not want other people to feel they had 'let things go'; Widdy talked about her shame when the garden in front of her flat, was let grow wild by the tenant responsible for it. She did not want it to reflect on her,

'One tenant that used to live here didn't have her grass cut, it grew up, the grass, grew as high as my windowsill. That caused me a great deal of pain; I had to do something about that.'

Widdy, talked about how planning her garden,

'... keeps you sane, keeps your values. Values are quite a lot to do with it.'

This was said at the end of the interview and Widdy was getting tired so I did not probe further but other older people were more forthcoming about the values they associated with gardening. Some felt these values were out of step with the values that now had common currency and there was a strong sense that they felt personally devalued or out of place in the world,

'I feel so alienated now. I said to Linda, the world I would like to live in doesn't exist anymore. The aggression - it is unnecessary aggression. And people think part of being a good businessman is being aggressive and balling and shouting at people.' (Ken)

'...what I am doing [in his last paid job], going out trying to prevent faults occurring, they count that as an irrelevance almost.'
(Gerald)

Ken was keen to stress that he was not opposed to change,

'...not a resistance to change, because I have benefited from change. Haven't I? Hospitalisation, modern surgery. All the things that go forward. Tremendous change that we all benefit from. But each of those comes at a price. If, on the way, you are destroying everything around you for what might be trinkets... This newspaper, advertising a car...these people are in a different world. The highlight of this particular car, it said, 'just imagine when all the heads turn to look at you in this car - Once the roof is lowered and all the eyes of the street are upon you.' It is absolute dross isn't it? I would much rather say - if all the eyes of the people were looking at some of the beauty of the parks and the countryside and our environment, and we should be protecting it. But this is where we are going. Just too take, take, take, you know?' (Ken)

Ken considers gardening as being of lasting worth and in the next quote he likens it to truthfulness, and by this it seems he meant something that embodied certainty and was anchored to reality,

'You have got people making decisions, not always the best decisions. Decisions to make more money. How can we? - Not deceive the client - but how can we work this to our best advantage? - I'm sure a lot of companies are quite unscrupulous and it is not truthful. But gardening is truthful. There is something about gardening that is truthful, isn't it? It is truthful.' (Ken)

This idea of truthfulness was something similar to Gerald's statements about gardening 'finding you out'; shortcuts and quick fixes were not of lasting value and if they worked in the short term it was only because somebody before you had done the job well. In Ken's account, retirement encouraged a different attitude to the time taken over gardening and in his eyes this was something of worth,

'...first of all you have to have the resolve to spend the time because it is very time consuming isn't it? And you have got to make time and realise it is something you can't ignore. It has got its own clock, and when things need to be watered and hoed and things done to it, it's got to be done...' (Ken)

Skill and expertise were respected by these men, whether it was in gardening or other areas of craftsmanship, and taking time to try to do things properly was seen as a virtue. Arthur also offered no excuses when things went wrong in the garden,

'I'm just annoyed at my incompetence – obviously it is something you have done wrong.' (Arthur)

Both Ken and Gerald felt humbled by their gardening,

'It rubs a lot of the corners off you and you realise how little you know sometimes.' (Gerald)

Ken's observation, already quoted above, is worth repeating because it highlights his willingness not to overplay his role in creating a beautiful garden,

'...it was forces beyond me made this. I can sit down and do drawings and make engineering projects work, but I can't do this and make this work. This is seasons and nature taking it's time, isn't it? ...I am not in charge of it, I am part of it' (Ken)

In their sentiments Ken and Gerald reminded me of the youngest gardener, Ellie, who said that she grew courgettes because they were simple things, and they stood in contrast to the complexities of her working life where values were espoused that dis comforted her. The sentiments were shared and were perhaps influenced by the period they were living in - their shared historical time - however the older people's reflections seemed more developed and this was not

perhaps surprising for, as Ken acknowledged, younger people did not always have time to pause, observe and reflect,

'But when you are working, you've got commitments, children to educate, university, whatever; you've got bills to pay...' (Ken)

Ken expressed real satisfaction in gardening but his choice of words suggested that his understanding of what made him happy had only developed gradually, and the satisfaction derived from gardening mirrored a process going on inside,

'...you have found in yourself that you don't need all these other things to make you happy. They are good, but they are not the fundamental thing that makes you happy. Happiness is what comes from within you. And if going out and doing your garden makes you happy, you have cracked it, haven't you? You have already won the lottery.' (Ken)

Several of the older gardeners expressed their appreciation and thanks that they were gardeners; far from resisting the label they embraced it,

'People who don't have that, I feel terribly sorry for them. I mean I've had as many hard times as anybody else, but the fact I have those two things, I thank God I was given those gifts of enjoying gardening and gardens.' (Clive)

The final extract from Gerald's case study is included overleaf as it captures many of the themes written about above. In particular it shows him actively using the lessons used from gardening as a way of working out which values are important to him and this in turn helps him to re-assert his sense of self-worth which had been threatened during his latter years at work. The continuities in Gerald's life are apparent and gardening for Gerald, like his grandfather before him, represents standards and certainties which he believes will stand the test of time. The case study also highlights Gerald's care and concern for the next generation.

Case Study: Gerald Excerpt 3

Gardening in retirement: checking and firming the foundations

The theme of discipline continues to run through the final part of Gerald's story where he has moved on to talking about the gardening he is doing in his retirement where he is working as a volunteer alongside and supervising offenders who are on probation orders. He feels it is the discipline imposed through the activity itself which is most helpful to these, mostly young, people. As he talks about this he begins to appear like his grandfather at the beginning of his story; he is presiding over a garden, not his own, which is large, where his authority is paramount and where he manages a team of men and women. He imposes the same kinds of discipline as his grandfather before him,

'I think it is the discipline of coming here and being told – dig that or weed that. Whatever I want them to do at that time of year...Sometimes you get the attitude that it's boring, but they only think it is boring because they don't know what they are doing, usually, and they are not doing it properly. So you have to start them all over again.'

He talks about the short cuts that have become normal in modern gardening and which he thinks are of only limited value,

'A lot of people just think these days that if you pour expensive compost on top you don't need to really do any digging. But if you look at the really good gardens where they are doing this, it is because somebody in Victorian times had been digging the garden well. My grandfather used to make them dig at least two spades deep.'

This last passage seems to contain hints of a struggle in his later life which is to re-appraise and then hold onto the values which were instilled in him in his youth and which seem to be under threat. He highlights his latter years at work as being overshadowed by values which clashed with his own; he felt his role was devalued and perhaps most significantly this left him feeling at a loss,

'I retired from being a surveyor for an insurance company. I was glad to get out of that in the end. I didn't mind going to find out faults or problems, that wasn't the problem, it was all the little tick boxes. They would be saying "You haven't ticked this box". But I would be [thinking] - yeah what I have done in the last week paid your salary for a year as well as mine...what I am doing, going out trying to prevent faults occurring, they count that as an irrelevance almost.'

He refers more than once to quick fixes and short term thinking which he sees as characterising current times,

'As a carpenter ... I cut the joints and did things nicely. Today it is all nail it together with bits of metal plate.'

Gardening seems to have offered Gerald a way of working through some of the issues created by these changing times and changing values. For him, gardening cannot be reduced to the quick fix and therefore it embodies a kind of truthfulness; he made several comments that seemed to amount to being 'found out' through gardening. For Gerald this seemed to imply being reduced to something real and honest, something that could be relied upon.

...continued over...

...Gerald

There appeared to be several elements to this. First there was the social aspect of his particular gardening experience, the interpersonal contact,

'If you don't do it properly they'll know what you do.'

Here, Gerald didn't spell out who 'they' were but I pictured his grandfather or his army commander standing over him making sure he didn't take short cuts. But then he shifts focus and seems to be referring to nature itself cutting him down to size through its variable response to his hands on skills, and his knowledge,

'I think if you get your hands dirty in a garden. If you are a hands on gardener and you do something with your hands, you sort of think - well that didn't work. And it puts you in your place in life...It makes you realise what an irrelevance - you assess yourself, or re-assess yourself all the time, and what your value is.'

'It rubs a lot of the corners off you and you realise how little you know sometimes'

Gardening and nature could also throw up questions, for Gerald, about which values would stand the test of time,

'It brings you into contact with reality, you are not drifting off into - I hear these lads - they talk rubbish. They haven't got a clue what money is at times... That is relating to the value of things. I say to them we take this plant and we split it. Now if you go to the nursery you buy each of these little pieces in a pot and it costs you five pounds. Now just dig it out of the garden and we get six or seven...It is not being a skinflint or anything like that - it is saying this little plant has done its season in the ground, now we will perpetuate it by starting again, the renewal of life.'

It was difficult not to see this same sense of renewal in Gerald's life as he described working with a young man in the garden,

'...West Indian he is culturally- St Lucia. He is quite a character in his way. But he said to me only last week, "I really enjoy doing this." I don't expect he's got a garden. He said, "This is like my granddad would do in St Lucia. I have been there several times and stayed with him, and he does the garden and sits in it all afternoon. Of course I always thought a garden is like that. Now I am doing this, digging this and weeding that, and now I know what my granddad does to make it like it is"'

Gerald felt his life without gardening would be 'very empty' and planned to continue working with the offenders for 'as long as they would have me'. When asked to sum up what his passion for gardening amounted to Gerald said it was about 'keeping everything looking tidy without being too regimented'. He felt the most important thing was to keep 'on top of things'. He then looked about the garden outside the summerhouse we were sitting in and began to imagine what his Grandfather would have seen - he spotted weeds showing their heads through a mulch that had been laid to suppress them,

'That would have had to have been hoed immediately...he was a tyrant in one way'

This chapter has focused on what I have called the distinctive aspects of the older gardeners' experiences and these are summarised in the table below.

Table 5: Distinctive Themes in Old Age

- Grappling with desire to garden versus desire to stop.
- Gardening lends feeling of being alive and connected to life; resists feelings of decline
- Strong feeling of responsibility of care for the ground and for life on it – stewardship - associated with having a function and a purpose
- Gardening provided structure to days in the absence of other commitments
- Gardening provided lessons which strengthened resistance to identity threats through identification and re-assertion of values – in particular, continuity, discipline, care, craftsmanship, thinking in longer term - were highlighted
- Awareness of need to be in step with the time frames of nature - continuity; not seeking quick fixes
- Notion of gardening as 'truthful' – 'finds you out' – humbling - reduces one to size – highlights the superficial and fake; is an anchor to reality
- Ambivalence about pests lessened - some took on changed perspectives and stressed harmony within natural world.
- 'Unselfing': Connection to broader forces and to other natural beings comes to fore, taking appropriate responsibility without seeking credit
- Thankfulness and appreciation for having had the 'gift' of the garden

In the discussion I will be considering whether the use of the adjective 'distinctive' is fully justified but, thus far, the chapter has demonstrated that

gardening is experienced in a particular way by the oldest gardeners. It is the case though that older people should not be seen as an homogeneous group. Some older people were still extremely active in their gardens and, indeed, gardening in retirement had provided them with some of the positive elements frequently associated with satisfying paid employment: structure and purpose, a role, satisfaction and esteem, companionship and commitment to a worthwhile project. However the oldest and more physically frail gardeners were clearly wrestling with a desire to garden against a desire to stop. They carried on because they felt a sense of responsibility and stewardship to their garden and they were encouraged by their emotional responses - to beauty, pleasure, and the sense of hope and promise inspired by the garden. Through their spiritual response to the garden they found meaningful feelings of connection, not to others in their immediate social world, but of connection to life in its broadest sense. They thought about and referred to 'broader forces' being at work in their gardens. This was associated with an 'unselfing', a move away from seeing themselves as central, towards greater awareness of mutuality and co-dependence and this brought with it feelings of satisfaction. Gardening was therefore identified as a 'gift'.

Discussion

The accounts of the older people in the study felt very different to the accounts of younger people, though of course there were overlaps and shared meanings. A key difference lay in the level of reflection that was associated with observations made of gardens and gardening; the older people seemed to draw more heavily on 'the lessons' within these observations and used these as a way of reflecting on, and re-asserting, their values. Their accounts were certainly in step with Erikson's conceptualisation of the crisis of later adulthood as one of 'integrity versus despair' (1959 p161, Erikson and Erikson, 1997). He saw the chief developmental task of this life-stage as one of coming to terms with the life that has been lived and facing up to the end of that life. The virtue or quality that he ascribed to the successful completion of the task was 'wisdom'. In the older people's accounts there was a very real sense that they were seeking to work out a narrative which preserved their sense of self-worth in the face of physical deficits that threatened their independence, loss of role, diminished

social connections and, when almost every activity involved great effort, loss of a clear purpose in life. Joan Erikson (1997 p9) at the age of ninety-three, added additional chapters (a ninth stage) to her late husband's work on the life cycle, drawing on her experience of being in that very last stage of life when, as she put it, 'Death's door which we always knew was expectable but had taken in stride, now seemed just down the block.' Kroger (2007 p233) suggests death 'provides the ultimate experience of aloneness' and for the very oldest people in my study despair never felt very far away as the gardeners described their struggles to keep going, against all the odds, and as they sought to make sense of their lives.

Earlier I said that most of the meanings of gardening were shared across all age groups but that the older people's accounts revealed distinctive aspects of these shared themes. I also raised the question of whether gardening could support older people as they faced some of these ultimate challenges to identity. It is helpful to draw on the theme of 'gardening and control', a theme shared across all age groups, to explore both of these points. In young and middle adulthood, those establishing homes and gardens for the first time, control was active – it was about them shaping the earth and other natural components into a form and style that fitted with their needs and desires; this active shaping of the environment, has been termed primary control (Heckhausen and Schulz, 1995). This differed in character from the type of control being exercised by some of the oldest people in the study, and illustrated in this chapter, where secondary control was more obvious. Heckhausen and Schulz have characterised secondary control as being targeted most often on internal processes rather than the external environment and as drawn on to minimise losses, and maintain primary control, in the face of threats to it (Heckhausen and Schulz, 1995 p284). The older people were less able to exercise primary control, that is they were less able to directly shape their environment, but still drew on gardening as a resource for exerting secondary control. They used gardening and the garden as a way of exploring connections, role and values and as a way of making the loss of primary control less profound. Gross and Lane (2007 p239), go some way to capturing a similar idea,

'The garden can come to reflect individual limitations and changing abilities or a retreat from a public role centred around work to a private or personal home-based world. At the same time, however, it also represents continuity, ongoing activity and purpose, a shared interest and social context. That is, a retreat away from the idea of no longer exercising control...'

By accepting that they were just a small part of the natural world some of the older people reflected on their significance and insignificance within the greater context of life. Far from undermining them, this seemed an important source of comfort; the role they had played had been neither so important, nor so unimportant, after all. The critical point seemed to be that they had identified the importance of connections, co-dependence and mutuality, and this knowledge - that they made up part of a greater whole - gave their life meaning.

Several of the older adults talked about 'greater forces' without necessarily having any overtly theistic concept in mind; it was more that they had a sense of something that unified the whole and they were part of that whole. In the older people's accounts there was little focus on the 'self' as a project, gardens were not about self-promotion or about lifestyle concerns. There was in these accounts what I term an 'unselfing' that is a lowering of concern about one's own significance and a heightened awareness of co-dependency. Widdy spoke about the ants in her garden and her changed relationship with them – she had learned to let them be and described them as 'my treasures now'. The shift in Widdy's thinking resembles that described by Cooper (2006 p160) who, drawing on Heidegger, makes the point that,

'To free things is to allow them to be experienced as the 'gifts' they are, to allow the world to become present for us through our engagement with it, but without our imposing upon them alien purposes. In other words, the authentic dweller is gellassen: he or she serenely 'lets be'.'

Cooper argues that gardening engaged in seriously 'with an appropriate sensibility' can embody,

'the truth of the relationship between human beings, their world, and the 'ground' from which the 'gift' of this world comes.' (2006 p161)

I have put forward the idea that there is something distinctive about the accounts of the older people and here I am arguing, in effect, that it was the older people who were most able to recognise in Cooper's (2006 p161) words, 'Why the garden matters'. This could suggest that people in other life stages were unaware of connections, or that none had benign feelings towards garden pests, or that they gardened only for self-promotion. Is this what I am saying? Now that I have covered all the life stages it seems appropriate to briefly revisit some of the earlier life stages and look at this question. However, it is a difficult question to answer and I can only put forward a tentative, speculative response.

I would argue that the older people's accounts were indeed distinctive but I would qualify this argument. They were distinctive in the sense that the older people not only gave voice to ideas about connections, gardening as a 'gift', and gardening as a *genuine* activity, but they also integrated ideas about themselves into this picture in a way that generally younger people did not; Gerald talking about gardening 'finding you out' and Ken speaking about being humbled by gardening are examples of this. Moreover, it seemed as if the older people had the ability to register and respond to the demands of the garden – indeed they were acutely aware of its care needs and felt a duty of stewardship - yet at the same time did not need to take credit for the outcomes. Older people seemed able to cast aside elements of self in a way that even the most reflective younger or middle aged people could not.

I am saying that there was a consistency and a quality to the older people's accounts that did seem to be age-related and seemed to reflect their developmental stage and particularly their engagement with a process of life-review. However other influences, besides age and life stage, were also at play and so complicate the picture and these other influences could produce somewhat similar reflections at other life stages.

Earlier in the chapter, for instance, I commented that there was a similarity between Ellie's observations that growing vegetables was something simple - 'a courgette can't hurt anyone' - and some of the things that Gerald and Ken were saying about gardening being 'truthful'. Clearly these gardeners do not have

age in common but, rather, experienced a common response to the feelings of discomfort that arose in reaction to their shared social context and, in particular, the economic and political influences that bore down on their current or most recent employment and led them to question the prevailing values in the workplace and perhaps more broadly in society. This is a period-effect, defined by Cherlin (1992 p31) as ‘if there were something in the air that influenced everyone’s lives’, that has encouraged them to understand and relate to their gardens and gardening in a specific way. It is a reminder not only of the ‘historical time’ and ‘social time’ within which people of all ages and life stages are living their individual biographies, but also suggests that gardening embodies qualities and values that somehow are ‘timeless’ and can be drawn on to offset disequilibrium experienced in the face of a changing backdrop.

In the previous chapter I explored gardening in relation to life events and there were clear overlaps between those accounts and the accounts of the older people. ‘Connections’, for example, were stressed in both cases and both highlighted the garden’s potential for ‘escape’ and ‘distraction’. The overlaps are not at all surprising as many of the life events had brought younger individuals face-to-face with life and death situations and they had confronted many of the same issues of loss and change that are encountered, with force, in old age. Is there a distinction, then, to be drawn between the way gardening is experienced in relation to the life events encountered at earlier junctures in the life course and the way gardening is experienced in relation to the major life event/s of being very old and confronting one’s own death? I think there is a difference, although again I offer this speculatively and, in part, my interpretation is based on a subjective impression that the conversations I had with younger people regarding life events and the conversations with older people simply felt very different. Trying to pin this feeling down, I think the foremost difference lay in relation to the place of ‘self’ in the account. For example when Lou was confronted with a potentially life threatening illness in her thirties she wanted to use her garden to make her mark, ‘like, I’d made some footprint’ and Frances, grappling with the death of her young husband, said that she needed to make ‘a stamp on a garden and say it was mine’. The sense of ‘self’ was still needing to be identified and expressed in these accounts and

‘self’, in this sense, was simply absent from the older people’s stories. Gardening supported people of all ages, struggling with issues of identity in relation to mortality, but was drawn on differentially according to the specific needs of the individual and these needs were influenced by life stage. I think it is important to say here that I am talking about tendencies rather than hard and fast rules; the sample was made up of a group of individuals and some of these people shared much in common with others in their age cohort, whilst others were more individualistic and some exceptional.

This chapter has shown again that gardening can act as a rich and potent resource, even in the face of a physical struggle to continue with the activity. Sometimes the fact that gardening in old age becomes burdensome - something that has to be given up - is seen as being the downside of a life-long love of gardening. I think that this is to miss a point. When Clive says, ‘So although I do it and I shouldn’t do it, it’s something I must cut out...’ he is, I would suggest, not just engaged in a tussle about gardening but in a struggle of a more profound kind, a struggle to re-evaluate and make sense of a life now full of limitations, with its potential stripped away. To borrow words from Derek Jarman, the garden has become both ‘Gethsemane and Eden’.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

‘Surveying the crop’

This study has provided some rich material which demonstrates the scope and potency of gardening. The life course approach has offered a valuable ‘map of orientation’ (Jamieson and Victor, 1997 p21) for exploring how gardening is patterned and utilised across lives. In this concluding chapter I draw together the different strands that have emerged from the study and explore what these might mean, primarily for the individual, but also for the societies within which those individuals live out their lives. I will revisit the initial aims of the study and consider how far these have remained in focus; at the same time I will re-iterate the limits of what I set out to do. I will review the key themes arising from each of the chapters and endeavour to synthesise these, highlighting key theoretical links. I will consider the strengths and limitations of the study, including issues of selectivity and the resultant omissions. Finally I will suggest some social policy implications, and identify fruitful areas for future study before returning, briefly, to reflect on the two cases which inspired me to do this research in the first place.

The aim of the study

The aim of the study was to explore the various ways a small sample of keen gardeners in the UK experienced gardening and gardens at different stages of their life course. The aim was to identify patterns and see how meanings varied within, and across, the lives of this very specific group of people chosen because, I considered, they would deliver the most intense picture of gardeners and gardening. A key objective was to identify the elements of gardening that people felt were supportive in their lives and consider how these might be associated with aspects of well-being. The intention was not to suggest that gardening was important for everyone, nor to attempt to identify any causal links. The study was, by design, interpretive and in places, when the data seems rich in meaning but scarce in quantity, the conclusions drawn from them

are necessarily tentative. I have tried to point out these more speculative aspects of the findings as I have gone along. Although keen gardeners are a very specific group it should be remembered that they form a large body of people; if the market researchers have it right, over a quarter of the adult population fall into this category (Mintel, 2002).

The Life Course perspective

By taking a life course perspective the study has been able to capture the dynamic nature of the relationship between people and their gardens and demonstrate that gardening is not a static phenomenon in people's lives. There are ebbs and flows, peaks and troughs, with different meanings having dominance at different times. The life course approach has underlined the relationship between the individual biography and the social and historical contexts and has highlighted how these broader influences can impact on the way gardening is incorporated into a life and on the meaning that it assumes for an individual.

The study has shown that gardens and gardening provide potent resources which can be drawn on at different life stages to support a range of human needs - needs that may originate in the psychological, social, spiritual, or physical realms of human life. These needs are, arguably, most apparent and threatened at times of change and transition and it is at these junctures that, the analysis shows, gardening is often pursued most vigorously. By looking at such times in closer detail, the potency of gardening can be most clearly drawn into focus. Gardening resources seem to be utilized in varied ways: passively and actively, hands-on and symbolically, individually and through interaction with others. As Francis and Hester (1990) suggest, the garden can be idea, place and action but it is through the synthesis of these three that the goods of the garden can be maximised.

The life course perspective has highlighted not only the different themes which come to prominence at different ages and stages, but also how a particular theme may take on altered meaning at different stages of the life course. The theme of 'control' was given in the previous chapter, as an example of this, where I showed that, although at the forefront of some people's accounts

throughout life, the nature of this control altered as people aged and faced physical and social limits on their activities, including gardening. Gardening was, in childhood and the younger adult years, drawn on, in the main, to exert feelings of primary control - that is the power to directly shape the environment - whilst in later adulthood gardening was increasingly used to support secondary control, that is, used to support internal, cognitive processes designed to offset the impact of having less ability to exert primary control. As I have indicated, some themes were particularly associated with specific life stages and the next section reviews these themes.

Life stages and gardening

Childhood

By taking a biographical approach to the data collection it was possible to see that childhood experiences of gardens may play a crucial formative role in fostering interest in gardening in later years. In childhood most of the meanings highlighted in relation to adult gardening could be seen in embryonic form and indeed some lifelong patterns in relation to gardening seemed, for some, to be set from a very young age. The major themes which recur across lives: escape, connection, care, control, aesthetic appreciation, creativity and pleasure, were all readily apparent in the recollections of gardens experienced at a young age. These could have been deceptive findings arising as a result of the retrospective method of data gathering with people, given the benefit of hindsight, ascribing certain feelings and beliefs to their childhood garden which were not there at the time. But I tend to think this is not a methodological artefact as so often specific examples were given, with real spontaneity, to back up the claims.

What was clear was that gardens in childhood had a high profile in people's memories and frequent reference was made to the adult role models encountered during early life. These role models tended to be concerned with the aspects of gardening related to its need for attention, care and nurturing, rather than its more transitory pleasures. This chimes with findings from environmental research, (Kahn Jr, 1997, Kellert, 2005) which emphasize the critical role adults play in children's lives in fostering attitudes that develop into concern for the environment in later life.

The accounts of childhood gardens also revealed in the clearest terms a characteristic of gardening that seems to have ongoing importance across the life course; here I am thinking of the way the garden can be both a very private space - for some children almost a secret fantasy world - and a shared place, even if this is only with the neighbour who looks over the fence. Even for the most private or socially isolated people that I spoke to, their gardens were seldom totally solitary places, rather, they were places that promoted feelings of connection whether this was with other humans or with the life springing from the broader world of nature. Gardens were never described as lonely places, despite the fact that people often worked or played in them on their own.

Reminiscences of childhood gardens revealed that childhood gardens exerted a strong emotional pull, even in retrospect, and this seemed to be related to positive memories of freedom, exploration and playfulness. These positive associations seemed grounded in childhood experiences but were carried through, and seemed present, in most adult accounts of their relationship with their garden. It was seen as a space where they could give rein to imagination and experimentation and where they were safe to make mistakes. Sebba's (1991) work provided some possibilities of why these childhood memories might be so powerful, suggesting that direct sensory engagement with the natural world, and its materials, was at its peak in childhood and this, coupled with their positive feelings towards the garden, gives these memories a particularly compelling quality. Childhood is, she suggests, the only time that such memories can be laid down.

Adolescence

It was clear from the absence of any rich material pertaining to adolescence that this was *not* a time when gardens assumed high priority in people's lives. If anything, at this stage, gardens repelled rather than attracted, possibly because they were too strongly associated with childhood and with adult responsibilities for homemaking. The evidence from wider research (for example, Korpela et al., 2001) suggests that natural settings, particularly those used in private, continued to be associated by young people with feelings of respite and

recovery, though it was unclear from that research whether domestic gardens satisfied the criteria of ‘natural setting’ and so fulfilled this function. Other than being utilised for exam revision, there was little in my analysis which suggested even this role for the garden once young people had begun to look more to peers and activities outside the home as a resource for their ongoing growth and development,.

Adulthood

The chapter on adulthood brought to the fore the ways in which gardening can be associated with a high degree of self-consciousness, and this was perhaps most apparent in the struggles some people had with the label of ‘gardener’. Gardens and gardening became something that spoke of the individual and issues of identity were threaded through people’s accounts of their return to gardening after a period when it had ebbed in adolescence and early adulthood. Gardening can be approached in many ways. It is an activity with multiple dimensions – creative, ethical, aesthetic and so on - and, as such, offers a rich repository that can be drawn on in support of identity development and maintenance. It was used as a creative act - an outward expression of identity - but also in many more subtle ways: as a means to ward off or resist identity threats; as a means of reconciling conflicted identities; as a confirmer of identity in historical terms, marking that there has been an existence. Gardening seemed to provide a resource which encouraged playfulness with identity yet at the same time it could provide a resource for promoting feelings of mutuality, embeddedness, and stability. It was therefore a resource which could support both change and continuity for the individual.

The analysis showed how most adults, though keen gardeners, had nevertheless lowered their own expectations and desires for the garden when they had children; nurturing the children became more important than nurturing the garden. Gardens were seen as important spaces for children and having children was sometimes given as the main justification for having a garden. Most of the adults expressed a desire for their young children to enjoy the garden in a playful way, free from too many restrictions. Parents with grown up families often expressed a desire for their sons and daughters to become gardeners

themselves in time and seemed to derive comfort from any signs that this was happening. Gardening and gardens seemed to offer an important intergenerational bridge and was sometimes cited as the ‘one thing we have in common’.

Negative life events and times of transition

Looking specifically at gardening in relation to negative life events helped shine the brightest light on gardening and its links with health and well-being. That people turned to gardening at such transition points was a strong and consistent finding and people expressed a firm belief that it was helpful to them; indeed, a life event often precipitated a new and lasting relationship between gardener and garden. Although keenly aware of the benefits, people had often taken these for granted and were not always able to articulate the specific ways gardening had helped them and the processes involved; they had appreciated the value of gardening without necessarily having fully made sense of it. The analysis in relation to these processes was therefore more interpretive and on occasion speculative but found resonance in the literature, both academic and autobiographical. In particular the findings enrich two key groups of theoretical literature, namely that found within the leisure-coping field and that concerned with transitions, loss, and bereavement. My analysis provides a rich layer of human experience which complements and brings to life the models and processes described in those works.

Specifically, gardening seems to play a part in people’s coping belief system; frequently people would say that when they were under stress they would take themselves out into the garden. I suggest it is the flexibility of gardening and its myriad possibilities which make it so potent a resource for supporting both identity and coping throughout the life course. When the person is in a period of major change, stress is a likely outcome and requires a holistic coping response as most aspects of life: spiritual, social, physical, and psychological (emotional and cognitive), are likely to be affected. The people I interviewed carried a belief that gardening would be helpful to them and this belief may, in its own right, be important as a stress buffering or stress moderating mechanism (Coleman and Iso-Ahola, 1993, Iwasaki and Mannell, 2000) and perhaps more

importantly as Iwasaki (2003b) argues it is necessary that leisure coping beliefs are in place before leisure coping strategies can be fully utilised. Chapter 5 demonstrated that gardening was a resource that could be drawn on to support the fullest range of leisure coping strategies. These included strategies for distancing and distraction, strategies for mood enhancement, strategies for re-interpreting and re-evaluating threats, strategies for developing and maintaining social support, and strategies which develop feelings of autonomy and empowerment and thus boost self-esteem.

My analysis provides descriptions of the way some people coped with a specific life event, for example a major bereavement, by drawing on gardening. Theoretical bereavement models, such as the dual process model (Stroebe and Schut, 1999) help us understand the processes involved in coping with, and adjusting to, bereavement but my analysis suggests how the model might be applied in practice, a glimpse of it at work, as it were, contextualised within real life settings. Other theory (for example Attig, 1996, Neimeyer et al., 2002) stresses the role of narrative and the need to maintain biographical coherence in the face of major transition and loss and my findings, by demonstrating the different ways people met this need through their gardens, for example, through memorialisation and through ‘making a mark’, helps give life to the theory.

Old age

The chapter on old age brought a more philosophical turn to the discussion. Older people, perhaps in keeping with Erikson’s designation of the last stage as life as one of integrity versus despair, might have been expected to be more inward looking, more concerned with making sense of their lives. This they were, but they were not absorbed with concerns of self and in this respect were markedly different to the younger gardeners. They were acutely aware of the deficits, changes and losses surrounding them - of body, role, values, people, and usefulness - and their struggle to continue gardening sometimes helped underline these deficits for them. However their reflections took them way beyond their own lives and own gardens; their picture seemed painted on a much bigger canvas. Gardening affirmed their sense of being alive but much

more than this it kept them connected to life in the very broadest of senses. Their life made sense as a part of a whole.

Gardening presented itself to them as a ‘truthful’ activity and something that could ‘find them out’ if they strayed too far from its demands. If done properly - caring for the soil, and caring for all the life in the garden - then the relationship with the garden would be one of mutuality and reciprocity; the garden would always reward good care and be something to draw on for sustenance and pleasure. It was seen as having lasting worth in *opposition* to the ephemera which was seen as dominating so many people’s desires. I use the term opposition here rather than, say, contrast, to imply a sense of active resistance. The older people’s reflections about gardens and gardening did not feel like passive reminiscences. It was as if they were each trying to say that gardening had embodied, and shown them, something more important than the stuff of everyday life and yet they were not necessarily making a religious point in the narrow sense. There was a strong sense of co-dependence and of being part of a world of nature which went beyond the boundaries of the garden to embrace all of life. Cooper (2006) has described the garden as an epiphany - of man’s relationship with mystery – but he states his doubts that he will find empirical evidence to support this notion, as most people lack the words to articulate the idea even though they may fully recognise the sentiment. My findings support Cooper’s doubts, yet in people’s, and most especially the older people’s, struggle to express what their gardens meant to them, I think they were coming close to describing the kind of epiphany that he envisaged. I would suggest that it is because gardens can provoke such responses that older people feel it so gratifying if following generations also embrace gardening.

Common ground

What gardening is and isn’t

Much of the everyday writing about gardening assumes, in an overtly romantic way, that gardens are somehow inherently ‘good’ and that they are always places of beauty and solace, always benefiting well-being. I shy away from listing gardening benefits – the findings could easily be turned into such a list - but this creates risks for proper understanding. I have used the word ‘potency’

to describe the resources found in gardening. I used this to imply that the resources are powerful but without, necessarily, implying that they are inherently 'good'. My findings suggest there is a much more complex and nuanced relationship between gardeners and their garden; it is not simply a case of gardeners drinking up the benefits of gardening, and the most aesthetically unpromising of gardens may nevertheless be fulfilling specific needs in the gardener. It is also important to say that in meeting the needs of a gardener at a particular moment the garden may simultaneously be affecting others negatively; we only have to think of how a particularly dominant hedge may provide one person with a sense of containment and security whilst for someone else it may threaten their light, their view and the fertility of their own patch, all of which may combine to reduce their positive mood. Some would go much further, Wood (1992) for example suggests that gardening is far from benign, demarking, as it does, the boundary between culture and nature and contributing to our 'estrangement from nature'.

My findings suggest that the 'goods' of gardening arise not so much because gardening is inherently good but because it offers such a range of possibilities in relation to action, idea and place. Through using the life course as a map of orientation it is possible to see that individual needs will vary as a person passes through different life stages but there is almost always some aspect of gardening that can be drawn on to meet the current need. Like gardening itself, these needs may not always be 'worthy' in themselves - for some the main motive to garden might be to assert their superiority over others as a boost to their self-esteem. Motives might lie in a concern to demonstrate a specific lifestyle which demands a garden that fits into a particular mood of the moment without any thought of sustainability or environmental costs. A dose of gardening is not necessarily going to do you good and I think an analogy might be useful to aid understanding of how gardening might be drawn on to support health and well-being.

I think it can be helpful to liken gardening to therapeutic drugs, though I must stress that I am not referring here to any causal relationship between gardening and health. Rather, we can see that therapeutic drugs are not inherently 'good'

but have powerful ingredients which if drawn on appropriately – by the right person, at the right time, and in the correct dosage - may impact significantly and beneficially on the user. Used inappropriately the same ingredients might have no impact or even be damaging. My participants drew on the resources of gardening selectively, sometimes foregrounding one particular aspect over others. Some people seemed to have a ‘chronic’ need for certain of the ingredients of gardening and these aspects remained at the forefront of their accounts across time.

My analysis demonstrates that there is no single meaning of gardening which should take precedence over any other meaning in terms of supporting well-being. Different aspects will be drawn on differentially, by different people, at different times. It is useful to recall that Iwasaki and Mannell (2000) found that leisure coping strategies were situation specific with some stressors requiring a distraction based response and others a mood enhancement response. Gardening seemed to be able to meet both of these strategic aims and were utilised by people in these ways. Having said that I shy away from producing a list of gardening benefits I do think it is perhaps helpful to provide a way of looking at the connections and figure 3 on page 218 attempted to do this.

The important point about people’s experience of gardening is that it is infinitely varied and can span quite contradictory things. For example, gardening can offer separation, privacy and seclusion and yet can, at the same time, be a bridge connecting individuals. It can be a source of escape and distraction whilst, virtually at the same time, be confronting people with the realities of the situation from which they are seeking to escape. My conclusions do much to support Francis and Hester’s (1990 p2) assertion that the garden can accept paradox, *‘In the garden as in society, there is an ongoing battle of seeming oppositions’*. As gardening can operate on several fronts at once, and can accept paradox, it becomes a useful resource for the disorganised and confused times of life, which are often characterised by ambiguity and ambivalence.

Gardening and the historical context

Gardening's flexibility also means it can be adapted to different historical circumstances, in war time it was 'grow for victory' and in current times 'guerrilla' gardening might better fit the bill. My analysis suggests that gardening might be an activity particularly suited to the demands of the current era, whether we choose to label this as late modernity (Giddens, 1991, Beck, 1992), post modernity (Lyotard, 1984), or liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). This is not the place to consider the finer details of this debate, but, regardless of the arguments, the adherents of different perspectives have points of agreement about the characteristics of the present age and it is useful to highlight these commonalities.

It is generally accepted that there has been a move away from fixed biographies where lives were prescribed by traditions and tied to age, gender, ethnicity, and class positions. Hand-in-hand with this change, there is the increasing individualisation of lives, with decision-making ever more necessary. With less certainty in the face of work and income, with the loss of traditional family structures, shifts in age appropriate behaviours and corresponding rights and responsibilities, and uncertainty about the role of the state, the individual is forced to reflect more and more on the options open to them. Giddens (1991 p214) talks about the 'reflexive project of the self'. There is the need for more fluid identities that can adapt to rapid technological innovation and the changing patterns and conditions of everyday life. Consumption and lifestyle concerns are now seen as key drivers of decision-making.

With globalisation there is remoteness to some aspects of life – employment may be governed from afar, there is often a distance between the consumer and the producer of food or other goods, a distance between someone providing a service and the person needing a service, and, with all of these, a commensurate fading in significance of the 'local'. There is particular awareness of the pervasiveness of 'risk'; Beck (1992) refers to the 'risk society' encompassing such things as global epidemics, the economic collapse of institutions previously considered rock solid with associated destabilisation of employment, and the increasing evidence of man-made threats to the world through global

terrorism, pollution and such things as deforestation and climate change. These are events that can feel distant, out of individual control, yet ready to impact on anyone and everyone.

The analysis showed several people actively grappling with aspects of life that seemed to fit with the picture given above. This seemed especially true of the youngest and oldest people I interviewed, like Ellie and Ken, for example, questioning aspects of consumerism; like Gerald questioning short term solutions – quick fixes - in working practices and like Andrew, trying to feel at home in an alienating urban environment which threatened his sense of who he was. These were people grappling for answers about values and about substance and worth.

The study has clearly shown that people frequently turn to gardening when faced with the challenges wrought by major life events. I would argue that such events bring with them, perhaps in heightened form, many of the same conditions that characterise the current era: the sense of risk and uncertainty with the shaking of assumptions and world view; the threats to a coherent sense of self; the need to be able to accommodate and cope with rapid change; the need to hold on to a sense of where and how one fits into a greater whole, just as the shape of ‘the whole’ is changing. I would argue that just as gardening offered resources and strategies which supported people at times of major life transitions, it is similarly suited to offer a resource to support people with the comparable but more generalised and perhaps less tangible risks and challenges posed by life in the twenty-first century.

In essence, gardening provides us with a resource that can potentially tie us back to the local, quite literally to the grass roots at our feet. It can re-acquaint us with feelings of being the producer as well as the consumer. It can give us a sense of industry and control, in the face of joblessness. It can re-assert a sense of time which cannot, indeed must not, be rushed, time more in tune with the recognisable rhythms of human life. It can offer ways of feeling we are giving back to, and protecting the earth, and not simply taking from it. It can strengthen family links, promote reciprocity and mutuality. In short it can provide an

anchor which helps fix us in time, place, and community. Never have such anchors seemed quite as relevant as now.

I am not saying here that gardening is something that has to be done in traditional ways, far from it, gardening allows for playfulness, experimentation, new modes of doing. It can accommodate new lifestyle concerns and whims of the moment. Gardening is not, in itself, something outside of current trends; it is part of the world of technology, global economics and mass consumption and in that mode constantly re-invents itself with new products and new plants, but alongside this and running counter to it, it seems that it can also provide the anchor points referred to above.

This might, in part, explain the upsurge of interest in gardening, particularly amongst younger people (Tobin, 2010), even during the few years that I have been working on the study this trend has been increasingly apparent. I say, in part, because young people have also been the target of an industry led marketing campaign to promote their interest in a gardening lifestyle, as they have been seen as the least tapped group of potential gardening related consumers (Horticultural Trades Association, 2011). It is very difficult to state therefore whether younger people are turning to gardening spontaneously or as a result of commercial inducements. I suspect it is both.

Core elements of gardening

Some other hobbies and leisure activities might share things in common with gardening and might be drawn on in similar ways but gardening has its specific characteristics that make it, perhaps, not unique but an especially rich resource. These include its direct connection with the earth; its association with nature, with life at its very core; its particular time scales and rhythms, which relate to and mirror the rhythms of the human life course. Gardening is concerned with plants and as Linden and Grut indicate (2002 p21)

‘...plants grow, regenerate, acknowledge and react to their surroundings, are open to manipulation and possess very varied properties and characteristics...’

As they point out these materials and characteristics provide an ideal focus for therapeutic activity. Gardening's position between culture and nature allows it to draw on both worlds and to incorporate the symbolic as well as the natural. Gardening and nature can provide rich material for metaphor and, in this way, gardening can assist people to reflect on their lives when words do not come easily, for instance, when events are outside everyday experience. Gardening spans the public and private and can be drawn on to support interpersonal and social development as well as individual development. Gardening is always, by its very nature, an exercise in hope and trust - in the case of gardening I have heard this described as optimism coupled with realism - but, unlike many other activities, when the hopes are dashed for gardeners, gardening has the potential to provide its own balm, to assist in the recovery process. Throughout the study I have been continually reminded of Francis and Hester's (1990) depiction of gardening meaning as lying in a synthesis of 'idea', 'place' and 'action' and feels this captures well the potential of gardening to meet needs across multiple life domains.

Links with well-being

In terms of well-being, the analysis demonstrates that gardening can support both hedonistic and eudaimonic goals. It can bring immediate pleasure and happiness, gratifying the senses and feeding the body in the here and now, playing its part in stress recovery and restoration of mood. Within this hedonic conception, gardening can play a key part in promoting feelings of happiness and satisfaction and moderating the factors that might reduce mood.

By contributing to development and growth of the individual over time gardening is also able to play a part in supporting eudaimonic well-being, that is personal flourishing and growth. In particular, the gardening life stories showed a shift, over time, away from pre-occupation with the self towards an 'unselfing', towards broader concerns about society and life as a whole. Gardening reflections prompted a growing awareness and appreciation of connections and interdependence. It could be argued that gardening simply reflected people's personal development over time but did not in any way prompt the development. I would agree that this might be part of, but not the

entire picture. Involvement with gardening seemed to provide much of the impetus and material that could underpin this personal growth. This chimes strongly with the argument made by Cooper (2006 p90) that ‘garden-practices induce virtues’. Here he is not talking about superficial engagement with gardening. His claim is,

‘that certain garden practices necessarily induce virtues since, when properly or ‘seriously’ engaged in, the engagement is an understanding one, imbued with an appreciation of what is being done: and it can only be this if, at the same time, it ‘invites’ and ‘brings on’ the exercise of virtues...virtues internal to these gardening practices’ (Cooper, 2006 p91)

Cooper suggests some virtues that are internal to gardening practices. He highlights care, self-mastery and self-discipline, humility and hope. Cooper (2006 p97) also talks about a process of unselfing, a term he attributes to Iris Murdoch (Murdoch 1997), ‘a process of detachment from absorption in what peculiarly concern’s one’s own interests and ambitions’. I am reminded particularly of Gerald’s story and especially his comment that gardening could ‘find you out’ and Ken’s assertion that gardening was ‘truth’. Both of these ideas were difficult to flesh out but Cooper talks of life lived in accordance with the virtues as being,

‘...in the truth’, manifesting proper recognition, that is, of the place of human existence in the scheme of things.’ (2006 p98).

The life course approach helped me to see that not all the gardeners I spoke to had experienced the same kind of relationship with their garden as Ken and Gerald. I do not, then, believe that one can argue that gardening per se leads in any automatic way to eudaimonic well-being. Rather, it seems as though some individuals become able, perhaps through age or life experience, to ‘seriously engage’ with gardening in such a way that they are able to fully practise the virtues that Cooper argues are internal to gardening practices. I would also argue that passive enjoyment of a garden, however strong, is less likely to lead to eudaimonic well-being than active working of the garden. I would not, though, wish to give the impression here that it was only older people who were able to achieve eudaimonic well-being through gardening. Gardeners of all ages

were, to varying degrees, able to practise the virtues that Cooper has described. However, older people were, in the main, the people who had reflected most on the nature of these virtues and sought to better understand them. Certainly it was during the interviews with some of the older people that I felt I was gaining a picture which fitted closest to Ryff's (1995) description of the core elements of eudaimonic well-being: self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and positive relationships.

I am open to the possibility that my feelings and interpretations were coloured by constructions of old age as a time of increasing wisdom and that I may have overlooked equivalent examples of wisdom in younger people. I think it may be helpful here to return to an issue that was raised in the literature review as a way of exploring this further. There, I commented on the quantity of poems that dealt with the subject of garden pests and I wondered at that time (early on in the research process) how to make sense of this pre-occupation beyond the obvious that pests were a nuisance for the gardener yet their destruction created ambivalent feelings. It is difficult to put what I wish to say here precisely into words but, having listened to all the gardening stories and read the autobiographical writings, I might now argue that these poems have significance, because their sheer number suggests that they reflect a struggle that keeps coming back to trouble the gardener, and I would contrast those poems where the struggle is articulated as one of gardener against pest, with those which portray it as the gardener's struggle with his own self. Gardening, as a cultural activity, that seeks to manipulate the natural world, always confronts the individual with a moral dilemma - to kill, or not to kill those creatures that confound the gardener's desires. However, the dilemma can be resolved in the first articulation (gardener v. pest) with a decision made *not* to kill - for life to be granted to the pests - without the individual ever contemplating the question as being about their own right to be making such decisions in the first place. I would argue that with increasing age, more of the gardeners, articulated the struggle in the second way, did engage with this question and the pests lived, not because they were *granted* life, but because the gardener was able to 'let them be'.

Gardening then confronts individuals with dilemmas, which challenge them to act in ways that are unselfish; to take account of considerations which are for the general, rather than their individual, good. I would argue that this leads to a strengthening of bonds and a feeling of collective responsibility. The study looked at individual stories but these laid bare some issues that may well have much wider implications for social policy in its very broadest sense and it is to these that I now turn.

Social and Policy implications

I am taking as a starting point the finding that gardening can act as a positive force in individual lives and that it can be supportive of life-long identity development and coping, especially at times of major change and transition. It can also support social interaction and intergenerational links and, as referred to above, can promote increased care and concern for others. As such, it is likely that gardening activity promotes both individual and group resilience and in so doing can contribute to a healthy society. Policies that support gardening both as a private and as public activity are therefore to be encouraged. Drawing on and supporting people's own ways of developing and exercising resilience is now seen as playing a critical role in helping people face up to, and overcome, the challenges encountered both during ongoing life development and when confronting major life events (Bonanno, 2004, Almedom, 2005, Firth et al., 2005, Ungar, 2005)

My study concentrated on gardening in everyday life but my analysis also lends strong support to the use of gardening or horticulture as a basis for therapeutic intervention and brings into focus the beneficial effects that flow directly from the activity of gardening, and the connection to the natural world, rather than from the engagement with the therapist or the therapeutic group. This type of intervention is therefore based on 'everyday life'; the activity can potentially be sustained and utilised naturally even when the intervention is finished.

As indicated above, garden ownership did not emerge strongly in my study as a necessary factor for deriving benefits from gardening. The focus of my study was always about the meaning of gardening carried out in everyday life rather

than on domestic gardening per se, and I found that people could draw on the resources of gardening in very similar ways whether 'the garden' consisted of a few balcony containers, a trough in a public area, a community garden, an allotment, or planting done under the banner of guerrilla gardening. Clearly there were some aspects of the private garden which were more difficult to replicate through more public gardening, but having direct ownership and control of a private garden was not always the most important aspect of gardening, even for those gardeners who did have this amenity. I think this is important to recognise with regard to the diminishing numbers of new dwellings in the UK which have a private garden. If this is a trend that continues, then other opportunities for gardening will need to be accessible, if the benefits of gardening are to be available to people. Against the backdrop of diminishing numbers of gardens and allotments there is a growing recognition of the importance of these other opportunities for gardening and some new initiatives are springing up. The RHS has, for example in 2011, issued a web-based interactive map enabling people to identify opportunities for community gardening (Royal Horticultural Society, 2011). As the RHS point out, though, there is no statutory protection for such community sites so, although their importance is being recognised, and access to them promoted by voluntary bodies, there is no certainty that these community based gardens will be protected in the face of other demands for land, particularly in the urban areas where they are arguably most needed.

If the personal and social benefits of gardening are to be maximised there is a need not just to protect access to community gardens, but also to make sure that these public spaces can replicate the opportunities afforded by private gardens for seclusion and privacy, the chance for playfulness and exploration, and possibilities for creativity and freedom of expression. These are harder to find in shared spaces or spaces open to public scrutiny and so will require imaginative solutions.

It was however obvious that people had a huge drive to garden and childhood influences seemed to play a crucial part in promoting this adult desire. Children's interest needs stimulating and motivating and with fewer domestic

gardens this could be in jeopardy. However there has, in the years that I have been working on this research, been a real surge in school gardening projects, with an RHS campaign to get eighty percent of primary schools growing their own fruit and vegetables (Royal Horticultural Society, 2012). An independent report commissioned by The RHS showed that involving children in school gardening projects, not only enhanced their learning, but also led to increased confidence, resilience and self esteem; promoted positive behaviour; developed a sense of responsibility and led to improvements in emotional well-being (Passy et al., 2010). Similar evidence has been gathered in relation to school gardening in the United States (Blair, 2009). My analysis would suggest that similar benefits may accrue to adults who garden and that social policies that, both enable adults to enjoy gardens, and encourage them to experience gardening may pay broad dividends, such as those identified by Kuo and colleagues in the United States (Kuo, 2004). Such policies may originate in relation to provision and delivery of health and social care, including ‘gardening on prescription’; in relation to housing provision; through land-use policies and town-planning; in relation to judicial processes and sanctions; and through educational policies. The evidence for the individual and social benefits of gardening is increasing, both in amount and in rigour, and I would argue that it is time that gardening be taken seriously; as Li et al (2010 p794) put it succinctly, ‘Gardening involves much more than twittering away one’s days in retirement’, or as Campbell (2007 p1) asserts, in her book ‘The Joy of Gardening’ it is, ‘More than a hobby or interest – it’s a way of life’.

Strengths and Limitations of the study

I am looking at these two elements together as very often the strengths of the study have been closely associated with its limitations. Exploring gardening from various standpoints originating in different disciplines has enabled me to appreciate the scope of gardening and its capacity to be a resource for the individual across multiple life domains. It has been necessary to draw on an extremely diverse array of literature, most of it quite new to me, literature that has enabled me to build an expanded view of gardening. This has lent richness to the study and has encouraged me to think in the broadest of terms in my own explorations. However, different disciplines have different value bases and

epistemologies, ask different questions, use different methods of studying a topic, pick up on different points of interest, demand differing levels of evidence, and use different approaches to describing their findings. The diversity has strengthened the study but also brought limitations; taken from the perspective of any one of the disciplines the study could seem overly broad and not sufficiently pure of method.

Disciplines have their individual histories of engagement with the topic. This means that some of the links between gardening and health can be supported by tried and tested theory, such as Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1995) whilst other links are much more speculative and open to interpretation and re-interpretation. It is tempting then to emphasise the more fully theorised evidence and diminish the importance of the more tentative evidence. This was, in particular, an issue with regard to some of the more philosophical reflections within people's accounts which, though they are very pertinent to the research aims, are hard to tie back to established theory.

The biggest strength of the study lies in its life course approach. This has helped me to explore the patterning - the peaks and troughs - of people's gardening experiences. It has brought the dynamic nature of gardening into sharp relief, and helped me to see that the meanings and benefits of gardening, although identifiable within most accounts, are drawn on selectively by different people at different times. It has helped me to remain aware that lives are lived within social and historical contexts. I have been restricted in how far I could use the most appropriate biographical and longitudinal approaches for studying life course processes and have had to rely on methods which depend on recall. Taken individually this might be a problem but when a number of stories are considered together then individual memory lapses or distortions become less of an issue. Work such as Sebba's (1991) which does not take the 'truth' of certain positive memories for granted, but which attempts to understand the ways in which certain memories come in to being, has also helped me resist simplistic explanations.

The analysis is full of uncertainties and conjectures. I would argue that this is one of its strengths rather than a limitation. I have found that people struggle to put their passion for their garden into words, and have not always been able to articulate its benefits, and I have sometimes found it difficult to write about. I think this difficulty lies in the subject itself; as Grut (Linden and Grut, 2002) puts it in the forward to her book on psychotherapy and horticulture, 'it is easy to show – the allotments, the garden, the people – but to explain in words, the connection and its effects and interactions, and subtleties is not easy.' My thesis rests on the recognition of the immense potential of gardens and gardening to offer potent resources which can be drawn on, in many and varied ways, to support people as they move, and change, through life. It is the sheer capacity and reach of gardening that is so fundamental to my arguments and such potential is never going to be straightforward to tie down, define, and quantify.

This study has been exploratory and interpretive and I am not making any universalistic claims for gardening. Other researchers looking at the same material would, in all likelihood, make different interpretations and judgements. My sample is a small one and there are some age groups, which are under-represented. In any case, there are only ever a small number of people in any of the age groups and therefore generalised claims cannot be supported. However the sample is adequate in size to suggest patterns and trends and varied enough to capture the richness and variability of gardening experience.

Future work

There are many ways in which I could have developed this study. I have pursued discussion of certain themes, and merely touched on others, and I am very conscious of certain omissions. The analysis showed, for example, that gardening promoted social interaction and in particular intergenerational connections. I have only scratched the surface, in terms of relating this particular aspect of gardening to individual well-being.

Another theme which could be fruitfully explored further is the whole topic of garden ownership, which did not feature so prominently in the accounts of

gardening given by my participants, but has, however, come out strongly in other studies, indeed Gross and Lane (2007 p240) go so far as to argue that,

'...the accounts appear to demonstrate that throughout the course of an individual's lifespan, the garden symbolises all of Francis and Hester's (1990) paradigm of the garden as experience, idea, place and action. However, it would seem that only when a strong connection is established through ownership of a garden can these concepts be experienced simultaneously.'

The whole role of garden ownership is a topic worth pursuing because, in future years, ownership seems set to diminish and people will increasingly be accessing gardening through means other than the privately owned domestic garden. It is vital to know whether the 'goods' of gardening will still be fully available to them.

Another area for development is to consider this research alongside work that explores other creative activity, such as music or art, as a support for promoting resilience and well-being whether that be at the level of the individual or community (See Hartley, 2007, Clift et al., 2010, MacDonald et al., 2012) .

To return to the beginning

This research was inspired by cases encountered in my professional life as a palliative care social worker, cases that I felt I could not then fully comprehend. These were described in the first pages of the introductory chapter to this thesis. How might I make sense of these individuals now? Firstly, I would be reassured. Although the problems besetting the individuals concerned were daunting, I would feel that they had resources within their everyday reach that could support their natural resilience. The evidence (the boxes in bloom and the flourishing vegetables) indicated that they were still actively gardening, despite the major issues in their lives, and by actively drawing on these gardening resources they could, potentially, garner social support; reassure themselves, and demonstrate to others, that they could care for living things despite losing those closest to them; bolster their self-esteem through plants well-grown; distract themselves through absorption in the tasks of growing; generate and reciprocate acts of kindness by sharing produce or flowers; and take pleasure and satisfaction in the beauty, form, taste or perfume of the things grown.

Potentially, these connections to the plants under their care might promote spiritual, or religious, reflections about their wider connections in the world, or beyond, from which they could draw sustenance and succour.

I would now have a better grasp of the conversations of life and loss that can be initiated through discussion of gardening - its practices, symbols, and metaphors. I would have better understanding of the therapeutic value of sharing a connection to them, through their gardening, rather than seeing it as an add-on to our therapeutic encounter. I am not for one moment suggesting that gardening provides easy or quick remedies - far from it. However, it is possible that through confronting the risks, the natural decay, and the unforeseen losses embodied in everyday gardening, these people were already, to some extent, anticipating the bigger losses in their lives and also had experience of the hope inherent to gardening. Had my concerns for these individuals not been assuaged, and I felt ongoing support necessary, I might now look at opportunities for referral to therapeutic horticulture, rather than a referral for more traditional counselling. I would be reassured that there is an increasingly strong evidence base for the effectiveness of such therapy and I would know, from my own research, that people can develop beliefs and strategies, to cope with major life events, and sustain a strong and stable sense of their own identity, by drawing on the rich and potent resources of gardening.

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Appendix I

Interviews: Aide-Mémoire

I am interested in finding out what gardens and gardening mean to people at different times in their life. I am interested in anything you have to tell me; whatever occurs to you, and you feel is important. It might be easiest for you to start with your earliest recollections, of gardens and gardening, perhaps from childhood, and to carry on from there.

Further questions / prompts:

- What is your biggest motivation? (Finished garden, produce, gardening itself). If you could employ a gardener, would you want to do this?
- Do you have an ideal garden that you are working towards, or that you hold in your head? (Description? What makes it ideal? Have you ever come close to achieving it? What/who stand in way? Has ideal changed over the years? Which bits of your current garden come closest to your ideal? Which bits of your garden leave you most disappointed?)
- Do you think your garden in anyway reflects the kind of person you are? Does it present you with any difficult choices or decisions?
- When do you do most of your gardening? Do you garden in the rain? Are there times of year when you spend less time in the garden? Have there been times in your life when gardening has taken a back seat? ...Or assumed greater importance?
- Do you generally garden on your own or with others? Does this matter to you? What do others think about your interest in gardening? Have there been people who have influenced you?
- How does your garden fit in with those gardens/spaces around it?
- Thinking across your whole life has there been a garden that has been especially important for you?
- If suddenly you couldn't garden what would you miss most? What other leisure activity might take the place of gardening? If you had to leave your current garden, how would you feel?
- Do you do any gardening outside your own garden (I am thinking of things like allotments, community gardens, and voluntary work)? Is this gardening different?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix II Ethics Approval



Lesley Adshead
Department of Education and Professional Studies
Franklin-Wilkins Building
150 Stamford Street
London SE1 9NH

16th June 2006

Dear Lesley

Re: REPSSPP(W)-05/-06-81 Approaches to health and well-being: the case for gardening

I am pleased to inform you that the SSPP(Waterloo) Research Ethics Panel met on 13th June 2006 and approved this application, on the understanding that you will follow the protocol as approved. It is the responsibility of the researcher to notify the REP immediately if you become aware of anything which casts doubt upon the conduct, safety or an unintended outcome of the study for which approval was given.

The Panel does request that you submit a risk assessment form, which should be available from your Department. The Panel also advises you to ensure that your gatekeeper asks permission from potential participants before passing on their contact details to you.

If there are any amendments, which in the opinion of you or your colleagues could radically alter the nature of the approved study, a revised application should be submitted. Proposed minor changes should be presented in a letter.

Please read the enclosed the Notes for Investigators of Approved Projects.
We wish you every success with this work.

With best wishes
Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Sudbury'.

Andrea Sudbury
SSPP(Waterloo) REP Secretary
Department of Management
andrea.sudbury@kcl.ac.uk

Appendix III

My gardening story

My earliest recollection of a garden is from when I was two years old. I remember taking my cot down to the shed at the very end of the long garden with my dad and my brother, Ian, who would have been five. I can recall feeling that there was something quite momentous about the whole business of the cot being jettisoned, but more than this, I remember that a large rat ran out of the shed as my father opened the door. In many ways the feelings of risk and excitement that the rat engendered, are central to many of my later recollections of this childhood garden. It was somewhere that I appreciated not for its beauty, though I realise, now, that it probably was a very lovely garden, but mainly for the opportunities it provided for adventure and particularly climbing - trees, fences, roofs, - in my memories I seem to have spent as much time up in the air as I spent on terra firma. I was certainly proud of my climbing abilities and the vantage points they afforded.

My brother had built us a tree house in, what seemed then, a very tall apple tree. I use the term 'tree house' advisedly – there was not much of a house about it – just a few planks for the floor, surrounded by walls of hessian sacking, but to me it was a great place – private, secret, and 'ours'. I can clearly remember the satisfaction with which I demonstrated my skilful and sure footed ascent of the tree. I had my own route, different to my brother's, a route which involved hanging upside down at one point and much swinging from branch to branch. The tree house provided a perfect lookout for observing the world, and particularly the comings and goings of the children in a neighbouring garden; we believed we were unnoticed and safely beyond reach. The tree house was also somewhere I would go on my own to just sit and day dream. I am not sure what I thought about, now, but I remember just being there and wanting that time on my own.

The neighbouring children were our adversaries, though why this was the case is completely lost to me now. There were ongoing hostilities between us which

culminated in a show-down involving buckets of sloppy mud. They had filled these and thrown them over the wall. We hurled them back but hadn't bargained on the snowy white sheets hanging on their washing line, blank canvases, just waiting to receive the full force of our retaliation. The mud oozed down them and I can still recall the feelings, of absolute horror, fascination and guilt, as I peered over the wall. We suffered no reprisals - their mother took one look at her sheets and beat the daylights out of her own brood, completely ignoring their cries of 'it was them'. I suppose I was about six when all this was going on.

Many of the memories of that garden relate to it as a place of freedom, exploration, and adventure but there was another side to it. I had an intimate knowledge of the garden. I knew where I was likely to find earwigs, ladybirds, caterpillars, snails, birds' nests, and I knew all the different plants by sight, if not by name; to say they seemed like friends would be stretching it, but they certainly felt like familiars - all important elements of my day-to-day world. Many of the plants could be turned to fun – the snap dragons made to open their mouths and 'speak' by squeezing a certain way on the petals, the fox gloves flowers could be detached and put one on each finger; wallflower seed pods were always compared, to see if I could find one of record breaking length; pansies were examined to see the 'faces' formed by their varied colour schemes. I made 'medicines', dyes and perfumes out of bashed up leaves and petals, food for my dolls from various natural concoctions, and I collected insects and grubs with a whole host of, now forgotten, intentions. I would always be on the watch for ripening fruit and vegetables, but always too impatient to let them fully mature before I tested them, a trait that still lingers I realise.

When I think back, the garden evokes two very different sets of feelings. The first set relates to challenge and fun and playfulness. It involves other people, chiefly my brother - where he led, I eagerly followed, never to be outdone. The second set of feelings are far calmer, solitary, yet never lonely, and I realise centre on a great deal of checking; checking whether things were happening as expected, whether flowering bulbs had re-appeared, whether the horse chestnut buds were still sticky like last year's, whether perennial plants had re-emerged

in the spring. I don't know what exactly I was checking – my own knowledge of the garden or the reliability of nature. I can, however, recall the quiet satisfaction and pleasure I felt at seeing that, indeed, the plants were how and where I expected them to be, year on year.

I never saw my mother as a keen gardener, though she enjoyed being outside, but it was my mother who gave me and my brother our own small plots, two identical beds, just behind the back of the house. I'm not sure how infallible my memory is, but I seem to recall growing something, maybe nasturtiums, fairly successfully, and being annoyed that my mother stepped in to keep my brother's plot growing, even though he neglected it. I think I was quite proud of this bed but compared to other recollections of the garden it is a pale memory.

When I was five my parents bought a farm, where we spent most weekends and holidays until we moved there, full time, when I was ten. With the boundaries between garden and farmland blurred, the scope for adventuring was much greater; the opportunities for avoiding supervision infinitely better. The patterns remained the same, however; risky play - with an increasing element of danger, climbing ever higher, and certainly with real scope for falling - was coupled with more solitary enjoyment of the garden and the natural surroundings of the farm. The 'checking' was an established pattern, and in particular I recall ritual visits to see if the flowering currant was blooming again, whether the wild gooseberries in a particular hedgerow were still there, and whether the patch of huge ox-eye daisy 'weeds' were back in a far flung field. My memory of these annual checks is incredibly strong even some forty-five years on.

When I was about eleven, my brother, then fifteen, showed less interest in having his sister in tow and my garden enjoyment became more solitary. My new baby sister was not yet a real companion. It was about this time that I think I became more aware of the garden as a thing of beauty; I began to appreciate it, and the plants in it, for their own qualities and not for their utility. I had favourites, especially the yellow roses that grew in the farm garden. I don't know why I felt so attached to these, there were lots of other flowers, but these reminded me, then and today, of the very earliest days on the farm, and they

evoke a certain strong feeling that I have been struggling to put into words. I've settled on 'warmth and anticipation' – it's a nice feeling, and a hopeful feeling, but hopefulness of what, I'm not certain.

I was interested in the shapes that the farm garden took on, as it developed over the years. It wasn't ever a style of garden that I would have chosen, being far too formal for my tastes, but I liked it because I could see that it pleased my father and made him proud. I loved it for that reason alone. He planned the different elements of his garden with care and precision; choosing the best plants for the site, making sure the soil was absolutely spot-on, with the right mix of manure and compost, both in plentiful supply on the farm. He gathered catalogues and books, made detailed notes in margins and sought advice from experts. I think the garden did eventually emerge from his plans pretty much as he had pictured it. I suspect that he was perhaps less keen on the actual processes of gardening, than on the planning and imagining, though he certainly spent many hours pruning the roses which were his real favourites. I recall the way he liked to tell me that a certain pink climbing rose that he had growing up a pergola was 'Zephirine Drouhin'. I don't know what images the name conjured up for Dad but he certainly rolled the words off his tongue with pleasure. He also spent time tending to the vegetable plot and, in these, we were fairly self sufficient. We always had help in the garden and so perhaps Dad was able to concentrate on those bits he liked best, or may be trusted others with least.

Dad died suddenly, when he was sixty five, two weeks after selling the farm and moving to a house which was far more manageable. Making the decision to sell up had been momentous and sad, for the whole family but particularly for Dad. One of the thoughts that had sustained him was the idea that he would develop and transform the large garden in the new house. He pictured extensive vegetable plots and even talked about selling the surplus to the local shop. This was not to be, but my mother stayed in the house for the next thirteen years and gradually, with the help of the gardener, made the garden her own. It was very important for me to have some of Dad's gardening tools after Mum died. The more worn the handles were, the better, and the closer I felt to him.

I was aware of other gardens during my childhood, particularly my grandmother's. She lived in a centuries-old house with a small courtyard garden, surrounded on all four sides by tall buildings and high walls. Her greenhouse was 'in the sky', perched atop a steep flight of stairs, with views over the town towards the ruins of the local castle. Her garden must have been immensely dark and overshadowed but she crammed it full of raised beds and hanging baskets and pots of colourful annuals, particularly geraniums and fuchsias. The swelling flower buds on the fuchsias could be burst open with a satisfying 'pop'. Her garden was very much to my taste, hidden and secret, with a real explosion of colour every summer. I'm not sure why, but everything seemed to flourish in Nan's garden despite the conditions. She collected cacti and on Fridays, when we went for supper, I couldn't resist poking and probing the prickles on the various cacti, despite warnings to the contrary and requests to desist. The plants fascinated me. Every week I would spend the evening secretly trying to extract the prickles from my fingers without alerting anyone to my discomfort and disobedience.

I left home when I was eighteen and for a few years my interest in plants, and gardens pretty much died away. I lived in lots of different accommodation over the next few years and some must have had gardens attached but I cannot bring any of them properly to mind. At one point I lodged in a house with a garden for the best part of a year, but can recall only one occasion when I put my head out of the back door to see what was out there; I didn't even venture over the doorstep. Similarly, I 'lived-in', for a while, when working at a nursing home and remember that it did have a very large back garden. I have vague recollections of walking round it, but only once. I don't remember feeling any negative emotions towards gardens or gardening but it was just as if they had slipped out of interest at that time. They seemed to have no relevance for me.

This was all to change when, at twenty two, I moved into a ground floor flat with my boyfriend, James, later to become my husband. We immediately set to work sorting the very overgrown garden. I know this was, in part, to provide very visible proof, to the elderly neighbour, that despite our youth and

unmarried status we were responsible and respectable people who did the 'right thing'. Our first plant was a single rose, a variety called 'Uncle Walter'. It was the first bloom in our garden that year and was duly photographed. Gradually the garden took on some shape, with small wavy-edged beds a rockery, and a lawn. We had a massively successful crop of tomatoes planted alongside some marigolds, 'companion planting', though I did not have the gardening knowledge to know that then. It was 1976, the second of two very hot summers, and pretty much everything flourished. James had no real interest in gardening, then or indeed now, but we tackled it as a shared activity, and he took on the heavier work that I struggled with. As things bloomed I think we both felt we had proved ourselves as adults, and had a sense of achievement and pleasure that we were transforming an ugly patch of weeds to something productive with shape and colour. I took delight in the actual plants and I think James was pleased that I was delighted.

We moved soon after our daughter was born. We needed extra space and a garden was certainly, for both of us, a high priority. I remember the next garden as a pleasant, tidy, and colourful space. I know I enjoyed having it but think that much of my emotional focus, then, was on bringing up our two children and nurturing the gardening was a secondary consideration. I wanted the garden to be a safe place for them, and a pretty place for us to sit in and enjoy, but I cannot now recall with any great clarity what we grew or what it meant to me at the time. I can recall far less about that back garden, even though we lived there for six years, than I can about previous or later gardens. Not all is hazy, however. I remember the small front garden and the window boxes, with clarity. Perhaps these seemed more manageable to me, than the back garden, or perhaps I could keep them safe from the children's attentions. Both bloomed very well and were extremely colourful. This was before the fashion for window boxes and containers had taken hold. My neighbour and many passers-by admired ours and the next year my neighbour also planted up window boxes. The following year the neighbour on the other side did the same and before too long a whole stretch of houses in our block had window boxes. I don't know whether the influence was mine or just the trend of the day, but privately I felt inordinately proud.

Our next move was to the house we still live in twenty years on. It has an extremely long and narrow garden. If I'm seeking to impress, I might refer to it as a Victorian ribbon garden, a term we came across not long ago, and which makes it sound interesting and somehow 'in vogue' rather than just an awkward shape. A small part of this garden, perhaps a fifth of it, was very attractively planted when we took it over but there were large sections of the garden which had been concreted over. These had been the bases for several pigeon lofts, and associated sheds, as the previous owner was a very keen breeder of racing pigeons. Initially these concreted areas were useful for the children to ride their bikes on, or for games of tennis or football, and so, for a few years, we left them intact but as the children grew up we gradually reclaimed more and more of the earth. We did it section by section, first clearing the concrete, and then planting the recovered ground as a 'room' in our garden. All the concrete had to be drilled or sledge-hammered through, dug up, bagged and carried through the house to the waiting skip. We spent weekend after weekend shifting rubble, some of the concrete had been a metre thick in places and was incredibly resistant. We lifted layers only to discover new layers underneath. One weekend alone we estimated that we had walked four miles up and down the garden backwards and forwards to the skip. It became something of a labour of love, a joint challenge, a seemingly endless task; what we had initially called a five-year project became a ten-year project.

Whilst all the recovery was going on, the previously attractive bit of the garden was fast becoming overgrown and neglected. Brambles were becoming established, the pond was silting up. But, at last, all the concrete was gone and we could finish dividing up and planting the remaining 'rooms' and start to properly tend the neglected parts. Some fifteen years after moving in we finally had our garden. I think for me it has always represented a sense of reclaiming something worthwhile. I see it as 'ours' not because of our ownership but because of the joint labour and the time that has gone into it. We have spent many hours sitting at the bottom of the garden in the evening, having a cup of tea and mulling over the day. Down there, behind trellises covered in hops and ivy, we cannot see any man made structure, not even our own house; the skyline

is taken up by the tall poplar trees that line the nearby railway embankment. There, it is possible to discover a real sense of peace in an urban environment which is otherwise, so often noisy and 'pressing'. One evening we sat out so late our son locked us out as he thought we had gone to bed. All these experiences combine to make the garden a very meaningful place in my life. I cannot, and do not want to, imagine ever having to give it up. If I picture moving I feel no pangs when I imagine leaving the house but dreadful sadness at the idea of leaving the garden.

I love seeing things grow, love imagining what could grow, and to a more limited extent enjoy the actual processes of gardening. I say that my enjoyment is limited because I have never had the commitment or patience to really do things properly. I want the results without always wanting the effort involved in getting there. I consistently find my failures frustrating and discouraging. I try to keep the failures to a minimum and enhance the chances of success. So I grow things not from seed but from ready germinated 'plug' plants. I rely a great deal on containers for instant appeal. I buy on whim rather than planning properly so my plants have to take their chances on the spot that is available in the garden. I do not always feel pride in my garden, however nice it looks, because I know of the shortcuts I've taken - I know much of the garden's success is down to chance and the resilience of nature rather than my skill or effort. It is always at the back of my mind that, this year, I will do it better. I sometimes think the garden looks pretty good but that feeling usually only lasts a fleeting few days before I sense the garden beginning to 'go over'. That, for me, is a really sad moment; it seems to signify that time is passing, slipping by.

I envy people's gardens that look good in all seasons but I never underestimate the work, planning, and knowledge that go into those gardens, and I don't feel that I want to sacrifice other things in my life to achieve those same ends. It has occurred to me that this might change if anything happens to my husband. Then I think I might feel differently. I don't really know, but it comforts me to think that I have the garden waiting should I need it. It surprised me recently to learn from my husband that he had similar thoughts. Should I die, he thinks he may

well turn to the garden – as distraction, but also to make something that he knows I would like. I wonder why we wait.

I still find myself ‘checking’ the garden, particularly in the spring. It never fails to delight me when I see the first bulbs coming through. I watch for my favourite plants re-appearing and think I get more satisfaction from seeing the first shoots, than I do from the mature plants. One of the reasons my garden often frustrates me, is because I become so attached to the ‘familiar’ in the garden and even if they are in the wrong place, or they clash with their next door neighbour, or they have outgrown their site, I am too attached to get rid of them, though I do occasionally move them. This is not a good approach to gardening.

I have opened the garden on three occasions to other members of our Residents’ Association. These were fairly low key affairs, open gardens with tea and cakes. I did feel a sense of pride that the garden seemed pretty enough to put it on show, but at the same time I kept apologising for its shortcomings. I think this is because I do have a picture of how I would like it to be and it never approaches my dreams, though sometimes it manages to kid, even me, for a day or two. The garden I picture is romantic, full of hidden corners, full of places to sit; rather rambling, with tall trellises, and beds without too much earth on show. I love splashes of colour and am not too concerned whether things co-ordinate or clash. I would love to shut out the neighbours’ gardens, not because I dislike the neighbours, but because I would like to keep up the illusion that the garden is a real escape; that there is no ‘out there’.

One of the things I have learnt about myself, whilst doing this research, is that when I am gardening, I might not always be enjoying it, but I am always totally absorbed in the task. My thoughts are focussed and almost never stray. I have come to realise that nothing else in my life absorbs me in quite the same way, though the wildlife in the garden similarly keeps my attention focussed. I can happily watch the comings and goings of my bird table for an hour at a time and my attention will barely wander. I suspect this level of absorption is important

for me as I have a mind that tends to whirl away at all times of day and night. I seldom switch off totally, but I do when I am in the garden.

As I get older I am becoming a more tolerant gardener. I rarely kill slugs and snails anymore though, I admit, they do produce hateful feelings in me. I happily put up with the mess left by the foxes that sit and bask at the end of the garden when it is sunny. It is obviously a play ground for them, as well as a sun lounge and bathroom. They leave all sorts of unexpected objects behind them; I have found balls, gloves, an unopened pack of sandwiches, a leg of lamb, a container of vitamin pills and a cuddly toy. Goodness knows where they acquire these goods, and why they should leave them where they do, but it gives me a lot of pleasure to think of my garden as part of their world.

Sharing gardens and gardening has become very important to me over the last few years. It is a topic I can talk to my mother-in-law about, and know that she will enjoy sharing her patch of garden with me. It is something my sister and I have developed as an interest in common; we always make a visit to Chelsea or Hampton Court flower shows one of our times together during the year. I work with neighbours to maintain a flowerbed at the top of our road and with my daughter started a gardening club at the primary school where she worked. I draw enormous fulfilment from all these activities. I sensed in my daughter the first awakenings of a real interest in growing things and in the school children their fascination, pleasure and satisfaction was palpable. When we tend the flowerbed passers-by, total strangers, smile, say hello, or stop to chat, particularly older people. It is as if seeing people maintaining the flowerbed reassures them and gives them confidence and a reason to make contact. I love that.

I am heartened to see my daughter's budding interest and would love to see this develop in both my children. If this happened I would feel that I had encouraged them to do something of great worth, a thought which would comfort me as I grow older. I have always known and loved gardens but much of my love has been unspoken and unrecognised even by me. I just enjoyed. It has only been this study which has made me bring to awareness some of the

meanings of gardens and gardening in my life. Doing the research has been an emotional journey. My thoughts about *my* gardening story have been intertwined with thoughts about my family, past and present, about life and death; about time and place. As sad and wistful, as some of these thoughts have made me, I become instantly buoyed when I take a wander down the garden, still checking, and re-checking – “yes it’s all in order”.

Appendix IV: Sample Characteristics

Pseudonym	Housing Tenure Gardening context	Sex	Age/age group*	Marital /household status	Ethnic background	Occupation	Location
Ellie	Rented /shared large back garden	F	25	Single/living in shared flat	White UK	Government policy officer	Inner London
Andrew	Rented no garden/ guerrilla gardener	M	28	Single/living alone	White UK	Advertising	Inner London
Mike	Owner small garden	M	43	Single/living alone	White UK	Teacher	Outer London
Rosie	Owner medium garden	F	43	Married/living with husband and children	White UK	Shop owner	Yorkshire
Trish	Owner small garden and rented allotment	F	45	Cohabiting/living with same sex partner	White UK	Nurse	Outer London
Elena	Owner large garden and two rented allotments	F	47	Married, living with husband and adult children	White, Romanian	Catering manager	Outer London
Alex	Owner large garden and rented allotment	M	49	Married/living with wife and children	White UK	Doctor	Inner London
Lou	Owner large garden	F	50	Married/living with husband and children	White UK	Ex-health service manager/garden designer	Yorkshire
Deborah	Owner medium garden	F	54	Married/living with husband and adult children	White UK	Lecturer	Hertfordshire
Frances	Owner large garden	F	58	Widowed/ living with adult child	White UK	Occupational therapist	Yorkshire

Pseudonym	Housing Tenure Gardening context	Sex	Age/age group*	Marital /household status	Ethnic background	Occupation	Location
Diana	Owner large garden	F	50-59	Married/Living with husband	White UK	Housewife	Surrey
Dionne	Rented small front garden	F	50-59	Status / household not disclosed	Black Afro-Caribbean	Arts project worker	Inner London
Alison	Owner balcony garden/active community gardener	F	50-59	Married, no children	White UK	Early retired from banking/writer	Inner London
Grace	Owner Balcony garden/ manages Communal tubs	F	60-69	Single/household not disclosed	White UK	Artist	Inner London
Leona	Owner small garden	F	60	Married/lived with husband	Black Afro-Caribbean	Health care assistant	Outer London
Robert	Owner large garden	M	60	Widowed/lived alone	White UK	Retired Civil Service scientist	Hertfordshire
Barbara	Owner balcony garden /partner's garden/communal plantings	F	61	Divorced/lived part on own and part at new partner's home	White UK	Retired IT specialist	Inner London
Kath	Owner medium garden	F	64	Married/lived with husband	White UK	Retired nurse	Middlesex
Ken	Owner medium garden	M	67	Married/lived with wife	White UK	Retired oil industry engineer	London Suburbs
Roger	Owner large garden	M	72	Married/lived with wife	White UK	Retired executive TV industry	Kent
Gerald	Owner garden/ Managed garden for residential home	M	72	Married/household status not disclosed	White UK	Retired – various jobs: carpenter/insurance/ probation service	Middlesex

Pseudonym	Housing Tenure Gardening context	Sex	Age/age group*	Marital /household status	Ethnic background	Occupation	Location
Celia	Owner large balcony garden	F	87	Widowed/lived alone	White UK	Retired / housewife	Inner London
Clive	Owner medium garden	M	88	Single/lived alone	White UK	Retired financial officer	Inner London
Arthur	Owner medium garden	M	93	Single/lived alone	White UK	Retired dental technician	Middlesex
Widdy	Owner small garden (now tended by gardener)	F	94	Widowed/lived alone	White UK	Retired local government officer	Middlesex

* age at interview given when this was volunteered otherwise people asked to indicate age range

Appendix V

Summaries of the Gardeners and their Gardens

Alex: (see case study in Appendix VI below)

Alison: a white woman in her 50's, Alison had taken early retirement from her job in investment banking. She lives with her husband in an apartment in central London where they have a balcony garden. Alison's main gardening focus is on a community wild garden which is being developed locally. Alison had been very involved since its inception and had taken part in much of the early reclamation work. She showed me the garden with huge enthusiasm for what it brought to her (especially pleasure in seeing reclamation of land and closeness to the natural world) and to the community. She was seeking a flexible lifestyle where she could combine a desire to travel - sometimes for extended periods - with maintaining a home and hobbies in her own community. The community garden enabled Alison to relinquish gardening for long periods when it suited, and she knew others would continue with the care in her absence. Previously she had sailed round the world with her husband in their own boat. She said the idea of gardening and planning a potager garden for their return had sustained them throughout the long voyage. **Foregrounded themes:** flexibility of gardening opportunities, lifestyle, care and nurturing, pleasure and satisfaction, connections (with nature and with community).

Andrew: a white man in his 20's is one of the youngest gardeners interviewed. A lively person, with seemingly boundless energy, Andrew lives in a flat in a rather rundown area of inner London. He has no access to a garden. He describes himself as a guerrilla gardener and with others has been involved in gardening forays on neglected verges, roundabouts, and spare pockets of railway land. He had gardened very intensively as a child and young teenager, taking over the care of the large family garden when his mother became ill. Andrew seemed to use gardening then as an escape from pressures and as a way of maintaining control, 'someone had to do it'. Guerrilla gardening seems to offer Andrew a practical way of asserting his identity and values whilst living in an ugly and unsympathetic neighbourhood. **Foregrounded themes:** identity

(expression, resistance to identity threats, continuity), coping, control, escape, creativity, pleasure and satisfaction.

Arthur: a white man, in his 90's, Arthur is a single man who lives alone in an owner occupied flat with a large garden in the London suburbs. He is a man of very few words, struggling to continue gardening as his health grows more precarious, but he seems to be taking this phlegmatically. He clearly has gardening routines built into his day-to-day life and with a little assistance from a neighbour, still seems able to keep his garden ship-shape and productive with a large greenhouse full of tomatoes. He found it very difficult to describe what he derived from gardening beyond the fact that he 'just enjoyed it' but he was clearly very proud of growing healthy vegetables and fruit, particularly tomatoes. He was happy to share apples with neighbours and passers-by, simply leaving outside them with a note to 'help yourself'. He hoped to continue to garden as long as possible – his biggest loss would be not being able to grow tomatoes. **Foregrounded themes:** care and nurturing, pleasure and satisfaction, functional rewards of gardening.

Barbara: a white woman, in her early 60's, Barbara is a retired woman who splits her time between her flat with its balcony garden in central London, where she also maintains some of the communal plantings, and her partner's house in the Home Counties where she tends his large garden. Barbara seems to spend very many hours each week either gardening or working on art projects, painting and sculpture, both of which take plants and nature as their key themes. She was the only gardener to question the dominance of gardening in her life and acknowledged that it sometimes squeezes out other things. Barbara constantly mentions different aspects of nature as she talks, - pets, tadpoles and flowers in childhood, wildflowers, worms, birds and butterflies, not to mention all the references to different garden plants - she says that she finds nature fascinating and loves to be outside. She finds her interest in gardening developing all the time as she learns more and finds new challenges to overcome. **Foregrounded themes:** creativity, connections, pleasure and satisfaction, care and nurture, aesthetic appreciation.

Celia: a white woman, in her late 80's, Celia had grown up in a family which served in Colonial India. She lived there in her early life before coming back to boarding school in the UK. Her childhood was somewhat troubled, and lonely, and her grandmother and her garden provided refuge. She is the widow of a judge and had spent much of her life in temporary (but often grand) accommodation provided for him whilst he was presiding in provincial courts. As a wife, without her own occupation, and provided with servants, she had a lot of spare time to fill and spent much of this tending the gardens – she was allowed to do this but was not allowed to take on duties in the house. Celia described all the gardens she had known and loved during that time in some detail. After retirement she and her husband settled in central London in an apartment block where she has a balcony garden of truly grand scale. Her love of flowers permeated the whole interview and as she told me about her different plants there was a real sense of affection in her words and manner. She expressed certainty that flowers and gardening were a source of support as she grappled with the losses encountered in bereavement and with her declining health. Gardening made her feel alive but she struggles to carry on and feels concern for the plants. Her garden had been shared with her husband and she tended it with his spirit still very much present. **Foregrounded themes:** escape, coping, connections, memories, aesthetic appreciation, nurturing/caring, joy and pleasure.

Clive: a white man, in his late 80's, Clive is struggling to continue gardening. He is torn between a desire to stop and a desire to keep going. The activity is almost too much for him and threatens his well-being but also, he feels, keeps him going, and makes life worthwhile. He is a single, gay man who lives alone in the house he has lived in since adolescence. His enjoyment of gardening and gardens is centred very much on the sensual pleasures it provides, and he highlights beauty, perfume, taste, and colour. As Clive showed me his garden he constantly stopped to show me individual flowers, noting some pleasing characteristic, and he encouraged me to taste the sweetness of the grapes he was growing. He felt this sensual awareness of plants stemmed right back to childhood and he mentioned a particularly beautiful plant he had seen in a

market, when still a young boy, which his mother had purchased for him so encouraging his interest. For Clive it was clear that gardening and gardens were seen largely in aesthetic terms, and he frequently referred to gardening alongside his other loves, opera and ballet as if all three gave him very similar pleasure. There were strong hints that Clive sought to express a sense of refinement through his garden, telling me for instance that his vine came from a cutting from the Hampton Court Vine, one of only a few made available to the public. **Foregrounded themes:** aesthetic pleasure, lifestyle, care and nurturing, identity (self-expression, self-esteem, resistance to identity threats),

Deborah: a white woman, in her mid 50's Deborah is married and lives with her husband and one of her children who is on point of leaving home. She has a medium-sized house and garden and lives in a small town on the outskirts of London. By far the most striking aspect of Deborah's interview is the way her discussion of gardening across her life is threaded through with references to family. She showed me photos of her in the garden as a child - helping, playing, and spending time with family. She talked of learning about gardening techniques from her father, and about plants which had passed from grandparent, to parent, and now to her. She frequently mentions her husband in relation to the garden and identifies the bits of it which are important for him. Most of all, when she showed me her garden, her ancestors and current family seemed all around. She had filled her garden with plants which in some way or other reminded her of specific people and sometimes of favoured places. Deborah said she felt that her approach to gardening and her interest in tracing her family history were driven by very similar needs and these were happening at a time of significant change – loss of parents, empty nest, geographical family moves. **Foregrounded themes:** Connections, care and nurturing, pleasure and satisfaction, identity (coherence and continuity)

Diana: a white woman, in her late fifties, married for a second time, Diana lives with her husband, and has a house with very large and beautifully maintained garden in Home Counties. Both are gardeners but Diana clearly takes ownership of garden. Diana has grown up family and grandchildren and loves to develop their appreciation and love of gardening. The garden is mature with

curving lawns and borders with tall hedges and tall trees which surround the site. The garden was extremely well structured and looked very picturesque, despite my visit being in winter, and was clearly meticulously maintained with a stylish greenhouse and a very productive vegetable patch. Diana came from a keen gardening family and had enjoyed gardening since childhood. Clearly it is an important element in her life and she spends many hours on the garden – did not seek to make it low maintenance – rather the reverse – wanted a challenge and something to ‘work at’. The garden, which she opened to public, seems an important source of self-esteem. She highlighted a period of intense gardening when her first marriage broke down; it gave her structure, distraction and escape at that time. **Foregrounded themes:** Care and nurturing (garden and family), control, creativity, identity (continuity, self-esteem), escape, pleasure and satisfaction.

Dionne: a black woman, in her 50’s, Dionne, was born in the Caribbean, moving to the UK as a ten year old. She gardens on a tiny patch of front garden at her rented house in an area of inner London. She had to fight to assert her right even to this small patch as a neighbour was claiming it as hers. Dionne’s garden, though small, had been packed full of well grown flowers and fruit and her living room was decorated with large structural house plants; vegetables were growing on her windowsills. She talked a great deal about the plants in other people’s gardens and local trees and was exceptionally aware of the plants around her in her locality. She described attitudes to land ownership and plants in the Caribbean of her childhood, where there was emphasis on community and sharing and told of her shock on her arrival in the UK at the way plants were used ornamentally rather than functionally, and at some aspects of privatisation. She has experienced times of upset and anger when her knowledge of plants, fruits and vegetables has not been recognised, and she has felt excluded from some aspects of the gardening world which she felt were class-based. Dionne constantly referred to growing her own food so that she knew she would get the authentic flavours. **Foregrounded themes:** identity (resistance, self-expression, continuity), aesthetic appreciation, care and nurturing, functional relationship to gardening.

Elena: a white woman, in her 40's, married with two children in their twenties. The family came to the UK from Romania, twelve years previously, for better opportunities, and live in the outer London suburbs. Elena is a catering and hospitality manager and her husband is in the building trade. They have two rented allotments and a large domestic garden of their own. Most of the land is given over to growing a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, 'everything, everything'. Elena's account of gardening, in Romania and the UK, is imbued with a strong sense of her readiness to seize opportunities and of using a scientific approach and hard work to make the most of them. Her gardens have to be productive and the many references to her granddad's abundant garden suggest those earliest influences were very important. Important too, in shaping her approach to gardening, were the changes surrounding the downfall of communism, which brought about new demands and new prospects. Her ability to grow healthy food is an important source of pride and she likes to share her knowledge. This has helped settle her into her allotment where initially there was disquiet about her plans for her patch. **Foregrounded themes:** Functional relationship to gardening (a means to self-sufficiency with an emphasis on growing organically and healthy eating), connections, care and nurturing, pleasure and satisfaction.

Ellie: a white woman, and the youngest gardener, in her 20's, Ellie gardens with friends at her rented flat - a relatively new activity. She grows only vegetables and struggles with the idea that she has become a gardener – resists flower gardening as something she associates with older people. Vegetable plot was small but neat and vegetables were very well grown and suggested she took a careful approach to gardening. Loves to grow and eat her home grown food. Feels there is something authentic and ethical about this and contrasts it with some of the aspects of her working life, which she feels reflect undesirable values. Ellie grew up within a family that enjoyed gardening together and as a child experienced the garden as providing escape as well as fun and activity. **Foregrounded themes:** Identity (development and resistance to identity threats), care and nurturing, escape, lifestyle, functional relationship to gardening.

Frances: a white woman, in her 50's, Frances works in the health service with people with dementia. She has adult children one of whom still lives at home. She had been widowed in her thirties and described that as a time when gardening became vitally important to her. She used it then for distraction and escape and has continued to use gardening for escape and as a way to recover from demands of day-to-day life. Her current garden is very large, in a rural setting in Yorkshire. She spends many hours in it, has a clear vision about the sort of garden she wants to create, and her hard work, care and attention are very evident. Frances constantly mentions privacy as an essential part of her enjoyment and large hedges, rural position and few neighbours give her this and an associated sense of peace. More than the other gardeners she seemed to have found a place and created a space which were her ideal and she hoped to live out her life there. Despite her need for privacy Frances was happy to share her garden and frequently brought her patients to see it. For those patients who had been gardeners memories were stirred and they could sometimes still share their knowledge with Frances. **Foregrounded themes:** Escape, time, creativity and making a mark.

Gerald (see case study in Appendix VI)

Grace: a white woman in her 60's, Grace came across as a person keen to guard her privacy and gave few details of her personal circumstances, beyond that she worked as an artist. She has lived for many years in a flat in central London and gardens on huge raised beds which are part of the estate's communal landscaping. She has maintained these beds single-handed for many years. She also has a private balcony garden. Her father was a keen gardener but Grace had found the family garden somewhat restrictive as a child – a very ordered and controlled environment - and she experienced gardening as a chore. However she developed a great love of the natural world and mentioned many outings to parks and gardens which she shared with her family. Grace's style of gardening was unstructured, naturalistic, and she liked to enjoy the serendipity of nature – allowing some 'weeds' to develop if they had merits – and allowing self-sown plants a place in the design. She felt this approach to

gardening was one way in which she could loosen her constant need to be in control. It allowed her to experience the garden as wilder than it really was and allowed a playful side of Grace to emerge. **Foregrounded themes:** Control (allowing nature to take dominance), identity (self-expression, identity testing), connections (to nature, to locality), pleasure and satisfaction.

Kath: a white woman in her mid 60's Kath, is married with a grown up family and grandchildren. She spends many hours gardening but her garden has to fit in with the many other interests and civic responsibilities she has taken on since her retirement from nursing. Kath gives the impression of someone who takes a very practical approach to life and the garden seems to reflect this. It is not a manicured garden, and Kath says how much she hates gardens which are too ordered; her garden is full of life, with dogs, and frequent mentions of wildlife, visiting children, grandchildren and their games. The garden is also the final resting place for various well loved family pets. Kath observes that the garden is where she finds peace, where she can think about serious issues in a dispassionate way and where she can find distraction from troublesome thoughts. She had just received some very bad news when I visited and she said her first thought had been to go out into the garden. Kath had first realised she could find escape and peace through the garden when she was at boarding school, a time she recalled as very unpleasant and disturbing. Kath's garden was not especially ordered but there were many signs of active gardening, plants being propagated, and parts of the garden undergoing development. Kath seemed extremely proud of her garden and rang me some weeks after the interview to tell me that she had been awarded a gold medal for her wild life garden in the local Council's in-bloom competition. She was extremely proud and delighted. **Foregrounded themes:** connections, escape, care and nurturing, coping, pride and satisfaction.

Ken: a white man, retired, in his late 60's, Ken, had first been introduced to gardening through a charity scheme to put gardening and flowers into inner city schools. He lived in a pleasant outer suburb of London and had a very pretty and well looked after garden, teeming with birdlife. He lived with his wife who was still recovering after treatment for cancer. Both were keen gardeners. Ken had

also experienced major health problems. Ken's working life as an oil engineer had taken him all over the world, sometimes to war zones, and he had also spent time on oil rigs working two week shifts returning home between times.

Referring to those years, he called his garden an 'oasis of peacefulness'; he felt it stood for something that contrasted with the harshness and bleakness of his working life. Ken spoke of the hope the garden had provided for him and his wife during her illness but also said there had been times then when he could not keep up with its demands and he had neglected it. Several times Ken alluded to the connections between gardening and spiritual forces. He referred to gardening as 'truth' and many times he asserted that the values inherent to gardening were lasting ones, and he read me a poem which he said captured his sentiments. The poem contrasted the dancer with the racer, and ended, '*The dancer lives intensely in the present, and thereby is able to drink from the wells of the spirit, that help him to live abundantly in this world of time and space.*'

Foregrounded themes: Escape, aesthetic appreciation, temporality, care and nurturing, connections.

Leona: a black lady in her 60's, Leona had come to the UK from Jamaica. She lives with her husband who is very disabled through illness, and one of her adult sons. She works full time in social care. Leona had not had many chances to garden until they moved into their current house, when she said her whole world opened up. Leona's love of everything to do with gardening, - the planning, the planting, the feeding, the watering, and the dead-heading – simply radiated out, 'my garden, I just love it'. She concentrates on her front garden and enters it, every year, in the local in-bloom competition. Her year is closely structured by the tasks involved in getting the garden ready. All her winner's plaques are prominently displayed and Leona is clearly very proud of her success. Her enthusiasm is very infectious; Leona clearly makes friends through gardening and says she sometimes knocks on people's doors to ask them about their gardens. Leona's sons don't garden but support their mother by buying plants and encouraging her. **Foregrounded themes:** Care and nurturing, self-esteem, aesthetic appreciation, pride and satisfaction, connections.

Lou: a white woman in her 50's, who lives with her husband who is also a keen gardener. They have a very large and lushly planted garden in a rural part of Yorkshire, having moved up there from south-east England. Lou has always appreciated gardening since her first efforts at creating a rockery when she was thirteen. She spoke a great deal about her experience of being very ill with cancer when still in her thirties with a young family. That was when she drew on gardening most heavily and saw it as a distraction and escape, a structure, a source of creativity and hope, a way of marking her existence and a way of feeling life had continuity and purpose. Gardens as markers of time featured a great deal in her interview. Lou had eventually decided to take up professional garden design and was beginning to get commissions. **Foregrounded themes:** identity and coping, temporality, connections, escape, creativity.

Mike: a white man, in his early 40's Mike was a teacher, single but in a serious relationship. He had previously lived a much less conventional life as a member of a rock band when ideas of gardening would have been laughable. He had experienced a difficult childhood and a space within the family garden had provided some refuge from unsettling circumstances. He seeks to create sense of peace, containment and shelter in his current garden. This was small but aesthetically designed. Mike could pinpoint major turning point in his desire to garden – the day of his mother's funeral - when he bought and planted some new plants with a new sense of urgency and determination to care for them. This commitment had been sustained over time. Mike felt gardening, and particularly his drive to provide a welcoming and warm environment was interwoven with his sense of self. **Foregrounded themes:** Escape, memories and connections, identity (development, expression, continuity and coherence).

Robert: a white man, in his early 60's Robert, a widower with a grown-up family, is retired from work in the Civil Service. He lives alone in the house where he lived with his wife and where they raised their family. He is a practicing Buddhist and he has many statues of Buddha in his garden which is large and well designed, with flowers, water, vegetables and many peaceful sheltered areas for sitting or eating. Robert has always found gardening enjoyable, keen both as a child and adolescent, and encouraged by his father and

grandfather, he even considered gardening as a career. Gardening had been a source of satisfaction when young because it was something he could excel at, not, then, being seen as very academically gifted. Gardening had been very much part of his homemaking project with his wife and her sudden death, a few years previously, had left him lost as to why he should continue; he had realised that he had, in part, gardened for her. At the same time he identified that gardening gave him opportunities for distraction, escape and ways of remembering his wife and these were all helpful to him at that time. Robert uses the garden for relaxing, entertaining friends and for growing fruit and vegetables. He is very conscious of healthy eating, being in tune with the seasons, and finds security in knowing he can grow his own food. A strong ethical thread ran through Robert's interview, in his attitude to environmental issues, pests, and sustainable living. **Foregrounded themes:** Escape and distraction, connection, temporality, functional relationship with gardening, pleasure and satisfaction.

Roger: a white man in his 70's, Roger portrayed himself as a somewhat reluctant and ignorant gardener but his interview suggested that he had always fully embraced gardening as an adult – for functional reasons – to provide fruit and vegetables for the family, to provide a good space for growing children. He had even cultivated some 'spare' railway land adjacent to his garden. However, he had embarked on a massive re-design of his garden during his early retirement and the garden he had created is attractively laid out, beautifully planted, and very enticing. There is a huge pond and a rill leading to it, all constructed by Roger and birds and other wildlife are everywhere, which he constantly drew my attention to and clearly valued. The interview took place in the garden and Roger was unmistakably very proud of his accomplishment, which he described as 'a bit of paradise'. The garden seemed to have provided Roger with a challenge - of a technical rather than horticultural nature - and the main driver seemed to be his desire for this type of challenge and the 'bit of paradise', rather than gardening itself. His denial of himself as a keen gardener had a somewhat hollow ring as it was obvious that, whilst he might feel his knowledge was poor and his drive to garden not motivated by pleasure, there were other drivers and positive outcomes that had kept him gardening over

many years. **Foregrounded themes:** aesthetic appreciation, challenge, creativity, connections, pride and satisfaction.

Rosie: a white woman, in her 40's, Rosie is married with school-aged children. Together with her husband she runs the shop in the village where she resides. She has a small but very pretty garden still predominantly designed to meet family needs. Rosie stressed how she adapted the garden all the time to meet the children's changing desires – for swings, for ball games, for dens. Rosie stressed most of all how she liked the freedom of being outdoors and felt stifled indoors. Her house had been modified so that the rear wall was mainly glass and she said that usually the doors were open so she could feel that the garden and house were one. Rosie's gardening seemed somewhat on hold, her own desires, subsumed into the family needs. Compromise was threaded through her account, but there was equal satisfaction in providing for the children. As I was leaving she drew my attention to one small planted trough which she had filled with very pretty dainty flowers. She said that her friend's young daughter was struggling with cancer and she had planted the trough as a focal point for her reflections and hopes for the little girl's recovery. **Foregrounded themes:** care and nurturing, family care, connections, hope, pleasure and satisfaction.

Trish (see case study in Appendix VI)

Widdy: a white woman, now in her 90's and a widow living alone, Widdy (her choice for a pseudonym) still enjoys her garden even though her days of hand-on gardening have long since passed. She had detailed memories of gardens which, she said, she could play through her mind like a video. Widdy recalled very vivid scenes of gardens known and enjoyed in childhood and even mentioned specific plants, especially jonquils, which continued to evoke specific childhood memories. She enjoys planning her garden, choosing the plants with care, and takes pleasure in the outcomes, especially, with failing eyesight, the colours, 'like painting a picture'. She talked a great deal about learning from her garden and from nature more generally, and stressed connections – with people, with birds, with insects, with God - and she described how with age, she had become tolerant of 'pests' as she had begun to

see the bigger picture. **Foregrounded themes:** Pleasure and satisfaction, memories, connections, aesthetic appreciation.

Appendix VI

Case Studies: Alex, Trish and Gerald

Alex: a reluctant gardener?

Alex is a 49 year old male GP who has an inner city practice in London and also an academic post in a medical school. He is a quick talking, bantering, energetic man who seems to attack everything with real gusto and enthusiasm. He lives in the inner city with his wife and four teenage children. He has a house with a garden but his main interest is his allotment which is close to his home and which he has tended for the past decade or so. The allotment is described by Alex as ‘squatted’ – it was a piece of wasteland taken over some years earlier without the consent of the local authority or any other land owner and had remained outside the normal systems for allotments. Alex was interviewed at the pilot stage of the study. He is someone I had known slightly through work though we had never exchanged more than a few words prior to the interview. I decided to approach him because several colleagues suggested that if I was researching gardening then I should definitely speak to Alex because he was really passionate about his allotment.

Prior to switching the tape recorder on I explained to Alex that mutual colleagues had told me that he was an enthusiastic allotment gardener which was why I had approached him. He acted surprised by this and immediately downplayed his interest in gardening and his allotment, suggesting that I had been completely misled. His sudden apparent lack of enthusiasm for the topic seemed at odds with the person who is normally so bright and breezy and who had readily agreed to the interview.

I first set out to consider how Alex’s ‘story’ relates to gardens and gardening as idea, as place and as action. Secondly I wanted to identify the ways in which the meanings he has attached to gardening varied across his life course.

Idea: What does gardening represent for Alex?

I began recording the interview with a degree of puzzlement and wariness - I wasn't sure whether Alex was being serious about his level of keenness,

Lesley: Is it true? - *are you* a keen allotment gardener?

Alex: I'm an *allotment* gardener..

Lesley: Are you *keen*?

Alex: I'm *distinctly* amateur and it's more of a lifestyle thing than I have any special expertise...

For Alex gardening is closely identified with his parents and in particular his father,

*'Gardening is **definitely** a big bit of my parents' life - brought up in a large suburban house with a large suburban garden and all dad ever seemed to do was do the garden – **very important for him...**' (his emphasis)*

Possibly it was something that consumed his father's attention and closed off other possibilities. Alex can see that for his father it was a very important part of his life, which implies that it had value, but repeatedly throughout the interview aspects of gardening are portrayed in negative terms. In his teenage years, it's a lifestyle to be rebelled against,

'... and I certainly didn't like going out to National Trust type [gardens] because that was my parents' lifestyle which I was rebelling against...'

He suggests other people might disparage his interest,

*'–“Oh you have time for an allotment, how do you do that? What is it like? Boring isn't it really?” Actually **No!**'*

Alex sees his parents' garden as fixed and unchanging, and implies that real effort has gone into keeping it fixed for over fifty years. He says.

'...my mother's still alive – still presiding over the same garden – unchanged over fifty years, but with a gardener to do it whose job it is to keep it as it was'

The tone in which he talks about this does not suggest that he has any regard for such continuity and yet ironically what he grows in his own allotment is also

very fixed. He admits he grows the same limited range of reliable vegetables year on year.

He uses the words '*still presiding over*' in relation to his mother and her garden. This might suggest that as a child he did not feel any ownership of his parents' garden...it was not his territory but theirs, perhaps making possession of his own little patch of it quite important '*I quite liked having it there but I didn't do much with it*'.

As if by default – it is not something he would necessarily have chosen for himself and something he still resists – Alex has become someone for whom gardens/ gardening seem to be important,

'...so when we got married getting a house with a garden was a big priority'

'...by then I was hooked on the allotment'

What does this mean for Alex? On the one hand he identifies the house and garden as possible symbols of growing up. On the other hand, making a garden a big priority might also suggest to him that he has adopted a boring, dull and middle aged lifestyle as part of growing up? His resistance to being perceived as a keen gardener could reflect a struggle within Alex against becoming, or being seen as becoming, middle aged, boring, and dull.

For Alex the 'squatted' nature of the allotment enables him to embrace the *place* and *action* of gardening whilst it recasts the *idea* of gardening into something more 'edgy'. The squatted allotment enables him to feel, and to demonstrate to others, that he is not bound by rules and convention, but is someone who is interesting and someone who has beaten the system. He links it with being alternative and anarchic.

*"...so it's **not some nice little tranquil place** like the Dulwich Allotments with rules" (his emphasis)*

Issues of discomfort with his class background seem to reverberate through the whole interview. However, after a decade on the allotment it seems as if Alex is

becoming more accepting of the gardener within and needs the 'rebel' image less. He talks about the allotment becoming official,

"...that'll change the culture then we'll become boring and stuffy like Dulwich and I'm not sure I'll continue. But I think I probably will because I like the patch now".

When Alex said this last sentence he said it very quickly and firmly as if to override the first idea - that he might not continue. I felt then that he wanted to make it clear to me that he was now genuinely attached to his patch despite the offhand way in which he started the interview.

The fruit and vegetables that Alex chooses to grow are even highlighted as potentially making him seem more interesting. He talks about the '*ritual of Sunday lunch*' and this use of the word ritual suggests an awareness of both tradition and predictability - both things Alex clearly does not want to identify with - but this is alleviated by the inclusion of the self-grown and unusual fruit and vegetables.

'Not many people know about squash and they think its exotic - these orange fruits'

*'...it's stunning and it's become part of our identity – **huge** succulent sweet figs every August 8th, invite yourself round.'*

Place: What does the garden as a place mean to Alex?

As a place the allotment is somewhere to escape to, with or without his children. It is a sanctuary. He sees it as a green buffer between the built-up and the natural world and a way of giving his children a taste of the natural in an otherwise urban environment. The memory of the children's activity there seems important to Alex. Early in the interview when first he mentioned the allotment he said,

'...the kids were young and that's a big bit of the story'.

Later he says,

'I think the family feel it's a family thing. Okay, Daddy does it but I think the family feel a sense of ownership and Chris, my wife, would happily go along and do it if I didn't...'

The allotment now seems to be a setting that holds these satisfying and fun memories for Alex. In this way it challenges his idea of gardening and gardens as dull and middle aged.

The allotment is also a place for gentle socialising with other local people. Alex emphasises that these are people he would not normally come in contact with in terms of background and class. This type of socialising doesn't need working at in the same way as his friendships seem to. There is a sense of Alex needing to get affirmation from his friends but the companionship of the allotment allows for easier, less demanding, relationships where conversation can be mundane and unforced and there is no need to impress. There is possibly a side to Alex that it able to be 'off guard' at the allotment and more relaxed about himself.

The allotment is seen by Alex as an entity to be owned and handed on like an inheritance which is paradoxical considering its roots as a squat. Individual possession of land seems important for Alex who eschews the idea of a community garden although that, on the face of it, would equally bring him in touch with other local residents. As a child having his own garden was more important to him than actually doing something with it. As a place the allotment is somewhere to be envied; within the urban environment to own a special bit of green, something not available to many is seen by Alex as a big prize,

'...others would like a chunk of that'.

Alex's domestic gardens do not seem to hold quite the same meanings for him as the allotment. He has enjoyed them, maintained them, and used them as a pleasant environmental backdrop to the rest of his life. But when he talks about his allotment there is an additional element, a pride, a feeling that he has scored a hit, won against the odds. This perhaps feeds a competitive side to his nature; the side that in childhood, felt threatened by the younger brother's superior garden. Many people would have simply done something else, chosen a different activity, but as a child Alex used his pocket money to buy a successful garden for himself. He had flowers despite the odds. He perhaps feels now that the allotment earns him [back?] some recognition,

'Maybe it had something to do with cred with my brother, you know, his passion; his life's work is his horticulture.'

Alex goes on to say that by talking to his brother about the allotment,

'...he realises ...that we've still got something in common – maybe it's a clinging on to those roots of my upbringing where it clearly was one of the values of my upbringing'

It seems possible that Alex is cementing a bond which is important to him but not necessarily easy to maintain because of geographical distance and different interests and skills. By demonstrating to his brother [and perhaps to his parents when he took them to the allotment] that he can successfully grow things he is, in effect, saying 'I don't need to cheat anymore... I have this because of my own effort'. His effort is doubly important because it is focused on something that has been seen by both his parents and brother as worthwhile. The allotment allows Alex to accommodate both his own values and those of his parents and brother in a comfortable way.

Action: What does the process of gardening mean to this person?

I got very little sense that the process of gardening was important to Alex. Only when he talked about digging the garden in the spring did I get a strong sense of enjoyment of the actual process. Perhaps the enforced break of winter allows the spring digging to have fresh appeal every year before the tedium again sets in. Clearly Alex enjoys the harvesting and distribution of produce and buying it would not be so worthwhile.

Alex has consistently taken easy routes through gardening; buying plants from his brother, buying houses with ready made gardens, growing a limited range of easy and reliable vegetables. Despite this apparent lack of interest he has maintained an allotment for about 12 years and intends to do so for the rest of his days. This suggests that the 'return' is high. The only time in the interview when Alex dropped his jocular, forthright manner was when I asked him what he would do if he was too old or too frail to continue. At that point he seemed to be lost for words,

*'Ohh, my gosh, then what then? I don't know, Lesley, what a –
perish the thought – perhaps perish is the word. Umm'*

So for Alex although the process is not, in itself, always rewarding, engaging in gardening is a means of staying on the allotment which appears to offer him sustained satisfaction.

Profile of gardening across the life course

As a child Alex seems to have an interest in possessing his own patch but little real interest in maintaining it. He nevertheless did not want to be seen as having a lesser plot than his younger brother so it appears that the garden was not something that Alex was happy to set aside, possibly because he knew it had value and importance in his parents' (and especially his father's?) eyes. There is very little sense of his enjoyment of his parents' garden or of mutual interaction in it. I was left with no impression of it being in anyway 'his' garden. Very quickly gardening is seen as part of a lifestyle to be rebelled against and there is no time or inclination in adolescence and early adulthood for gardening or gardens; establishing a career and other activities take over completely.

Alongside marriage, ownership of a house with a garden is seen as a significant symbol of growing up, of adulthood – he does not choose a flat though that would have been an option. He wants the garden (a big south facing garden) not for the process of gardening but to provide a suitable space for family and as part of a lifestyle – a space to entertain friends and as a pleasant backdrop to urban living.

The allotment comes into his life in his late thirties, he says, by default (he looked after it for a friend who was abroad) - though he made two decisions- first to take care of it, when he could have said, with justification, "I don't have time – I am a busy GP – the children are young – we already have the garden". It is not immediately obvious why Alex took the allotment on in the first place, but he did, and, when the friend asked him if he wanted it permanently, he had a second opportunity to say "no" but chose not to. Indeed the allotment is something that is now worth defending. He says he would now 'fight for it'.

Alex's whole account is riddled with ambivalence and even denial about the garden and allotment and his attachment to them. However his enthusiasm, particularly for the allotment, simply bursts out of him. I was left in no doubt that it does play a very important part in his life. He looked happy when he spoke about it. He encouraged me repeatedly to come and see the allotment. He seemed energised by talking about it. He was proud of the things he produced.

Alex saw the allotment as a nurturing place for his children and as a place of respite for himself when the children were small and the pressures of rearing them were high. It had a useful practical purpose at that time in his life. But Alex has gone on tending the allotment even as the children have grown and they are less involved. He sees it as a bridge between himself and community, between himself and friends, between him and his brother. Such feelings of being connected may have a particular significance in mid life with the ageing and death of parents and the growing independence of children. A sense of continuity with the past may assume greater importance at this time. Most striking for me was how Alex seemed to portray the allotment as a peaceful place despite his protestations that it was no such thing. The relations with people there were undemanding and did not need to be thought about too much. There was mutuality to them and naturalness. This appeared to fulfil a need in Alex who gave the impression several times of being extremely competitive. It could be that the allotment offered an antidote to this side of his personality whilst at the same time providing an outlet for his competitive nature (made his competitiveness more benign?).

Being asked to picture his older years and a time when he could not manage the allotment seemed to cause Alex to lose his composure. He seemed genuinely thrown for a moment before quickly deciding that he would potter on the allotment as part of his retirement strategy. Certainly, Alex has no intention of giving up the allotment and sees himself still there in twenty years.

Trish: a passion for gardening

Trish is a 45 year old white woman who lives with Katherine, her civil partner, in a terraced house in outer London. She has a small back garden and, with Katherine, also maintains an allotment which is about 15 minutes drive away from their home. Our interview took place at her home and I was able to see her garden which, although small, was carefully tended and very well designed. The design had been done by the previous owner of the house who was a landscape gardener.

Trish's gardening narrative is a story which tells of a constant love of the natural world including the garden. There are, however, two clear turning points when Trish recognises transformations both in her relationship to gardening and in herself. The first of these is in late adolescence, when her love of gardening first takes a real hold and the second is when her mother dies and Trish draws on gardening as a key strategy for coping.

Gardening foundations

Trish's gardening story starts very clearly in childhood,

'The outdoors was always something I was very partial to... Always in the garden. Always out...I knew what I liked and I liked the garden when it was all flowery....I was outside always, when I got bigger and bigger, I wanted to be outside....At any time of year. '

Her mother did her best to acknowledge and satisfy Trish's individual tastes,

'My mum would put geraniums in, and pansies for me because they were my favourite...I always wanted pansies and mum put them in every year and she would say – what do you want in? And I would say – pansies'.

For Trish her childhood garden seems to have been a place of fun, action, sociability and life,

'There was me and all my friends...there were dogs, there were cats, there were rabbits, there were tortoises. And there was no money, so there were no swings. So we basically ran around in the garden and threw balls at each other'

But as well as play there was gardening activity,

'I helped with the garden. And I enjoyed it. It was never a chore. And I got interested in growing my own bits as I got older.'

Trish said that she learned most about gardening from her grandmother, who was still alive aged 96 at the time of the interview. Trish's love for, and closeness to, her grandmother was very apparent and she said that she would always be 'grateful that it was nana that taught me those bits'.

'I did get really keen on the roses, the care of the roses. Now my grandma, my nana, was a really keen gardener although she ran a pub for years. But when they retired and got a garden, whenever I went up there I would help her in her garden, because she had a really colourful garden. Amazing...she had been the one to show me how to grow runner beans. And what is weeding and what is compost. All the things that are really simple, and you take for granted if you are a gardener, but you have to learn them at some point...she certainly showed me a lot more about things than my parents. She taught me how to deal with the roses.'

Trish recognised that there was a brief period when her attention on gardening waned,

'But then as an adolescent I didn't do much, because my life went in a different way. I was at a music school, doing all this music stuff, and I guess my spare time was taken up with music, rather than being able to get out.'

The family life portrayed by Trish seems to have been full of warmth, attention and care but there was another side to her life,

'...when I was at school, in the seventies, during all the race riots I was quite bullied for the fact that my dad was a policeman. And I loved him, so I didn't get that...'

Trish seems to have been sociable, she certainly had friends, but she was not at ease, she didn't always feel she fitted in, and she was socially timid, describing herself as 'very, very shy',

'I don't think I had ever, ever spent a night away from home...I had never spent the night at any of my friend's houses, socially - I wasn't having any of that.'

Trish recounted how her mother took the situation in hand and against Trish's own wishes, booked her onto a conservation holiday when she was 16,

'She wanted me to learn to be in the world without my mum and dad really'.

Firming the foundations

This holiday proved to be a major turning point in Trish's life, and confirmed what she described as her 'complete love affair' with the world of things that grow.

'I met all these people, and they were gentle people because their interest was in conservation. They cared about birds and frogs and plants. So my mum was very clever. They were the right people to send me off to meet...'

It is clear from Trish's account that two aspects of her self were boosted during those holidays. First, her sense of self as a likeable person was heightened, and she discovered a new side to her personality,

'...it enabled me to mix with other people and realise that people wanted to mix with me. I found that I had a very dry sense of humour. But I didn't know that. It was when I was there that I found that, and people would laugh at my jokes and it was marvellous. You know?'

And second, her love of the natural world was shared with, and endorsed by, a group of interesting and informed people who she admired, the same people who had made her feel accepted and fun to be with,

'And the people I was with were identifying things right left and centre, you know – oh this is Royal Fern and this is this, oh that butterfly is a so and so. And I was just inspired by how they could know so much, and how fabulous it all was. There is a real upsurge of it now, if you look at the television now. Well, I went through that, at sixteen...'

It was obvious from her account that this really was a significant time for Trish, a time when she was released from many of her usual cares,

'And my music didn't matter and my O levels didn't matter, and the fact that my dad was a policeman didn't matter. None of it'

mattered. And I loved it. So every summer holiday I would regularly go off and do lots of this work. So that was when I developed a passion for things that grow.'

Trish's enthusiasm carried over from the working holidays into her day-to-day life,

'So get home from that first revelation and that was me, out in the gardens with the bird feeders, and the seeds and – let's plant stuff, let's look after stuff, let's look after stuff.'

Trish described it as one of the regrets of her life that she had not pursued a career in horticulture from then onwards,

'But there was something about me, coming from a fairly suburban area, my mum was a nurse, my dad was a policeman, that felt that that [horticulture] was for holidays and hobbies and exotic loveliness, but it wouldn't be a real job. And that is why, I guess, if I have got any regret in my life it is that I didn't realise I could do that for a living. Because I would have been good at it, I would have loved it, and it would have changed my entire life.'

She becomes a nurse, living in nurses' accommodation and she has no access for some years to a garden of her own. She finds this time frustrating,

'So, started nurse training, didn't have a garden, most disappointed, nurses home. And then I lived in various flats...'

From that point onwards conservation work as a holiday activity remains a priority, and a constant source of pleasure, in Trish's life.

'Which was funny, because it set me apart from all the people I trained with. Because they would go on package holidays together. Eight of them would go off to Ibiza together, and that wasn't me. That wasn't me in so many ways. And I would go off to do dry stone walling or what have you for a week, and come back absolutely ready to do battle with the sick and needy again.'

Having a garden of her own becomes a goal for Trish and she saves assiduously towards this end,

'When I was twenty four I bought a flat with a garden. I had been saving up the whole of my training because I wanted a house with a garden. And I had acquired a cat by then as well. So I went to the

estate agent and said – I want a ground floor flat with a garden and cat flap.'

When Trish describes her first garden two aspects become apparent. First the effort and determination that went into turning it from a promising site into 'her garden',

'And it was fantastic. The garden was sixty or seventy feet, which, for London, is stunning. And it was south facing and it was really warm. And it was, in fact, a builder's yard, because the flat was a conversion. And so I spent the first few years that I lived there just taking stuff in my rattly old Skoda, to the dump. And I would go every day to the dump, back and forth, back and forth. And the guy in the dump said to me once – you really should have got a skip. But I didn't have a penny to my name. And I eventually cleared it and it was just a big muddy thing.'

Having arrived at this point Trish found that she could not afford to stock it,

'But then, what happened was, do you remember when all the interest rates went up? In '89? That was when I bought. And I was a junior nurse with a hundred percent mortgage. I really couldn't buy ... I think I bought the odd packet of seeds but it was absolutely disastrous.'

She admits to taking drastic action,

'So I made the whole garden from cuttings from the front gardens. I used to go down the street at night ... I can't believe I did this...

LA: Gardening turned you into a thief!

It did! I would go down the street at night, on my way home from a late shift, and it would be dark. I would always have a plastic bag and a knife and even plants I didn't like, I was just cutting, cutting, cutting, to grow some stock to put in my [garden] ...'

The second aspect which becomes apparent is Trish's unconditional love for her garden, despite its unplanned nature and imperfections,

'Nothing really went with anything, but I didn't care. The most successful thing was Californian poppies. I happened to come across some seed pods of Californian poppies...They are very delicate and they open in the sun and close at night and they are just annual. And I threw these seed pods down thinking nothing would happen. And they virtually overtook the garden. It was hysterical. So, anyway, I loved it, and it wasn't much of a garden, it wasn't

designed. Oh, if I had it now... At the time I thought it probably could have won a prize at Chelsea, I loved it so much.'

Trish and Katherine eventually moved from the first flat and bought their current house where the garden was already designed and under control. They had fallen for the house despite the garden and she was very conscious of its limitations,

'We love this house and we will live here forever, I imagine. But there is a little bit of me that thinks – if we ever did move I would so love a garden that faced the right way, so I could have vegetables at the end and a greenhouse. And flowers and a garden, a sitting garden. And I would like a little pond, because I love water lilies. I can't do anything out there. There is no point even trying to grow vegetables out there.'

I sensed ambivalence and discomfort in Trish as she described her feelings about her current garden; she seemed to struggle with a need to love this garden unconditionally,

'So there are times when I get quite dismal about that garden. I love it, but there are times I go out there and I think – oh. Well, no, I am happy in that garden. I go out every day. It is quite a tidy garden, because I am on top of it. I suppose. Talking about low points. About three years ago we decided to take the allotment, because I so wanted to grow vegetables.'

The allotment had clearly met many of Trish's desires, which the current garden could not meet,

'South facing. Sun. Well, actually I have got a flower patch there, so I can grow all the flowers I can't grow here in the shade. So what the allotment is, is the next best thing to having a garden that faces the right way and has the room to grow. So all the things I would love to do out here, I do on the allotment. I have this little patch on the allotment that started off as a few cuttings of Sedum and Buddlea, what have you, for the bees and the butterflies, because it is all organic and natural up there....And this year has been it's best year ever. It was this huge abundance, this amazing border of purple and orange and blue, because I put Californian Poppies everywhere I go now... And it was fantastic. Everybody would walk over to our plot, saying – that is fantastic, you must have spent so long putting every seed in it's actual place. Well no, I just threw it on and nature did it. It is because of the conditions there, because of the sun. Absolutely gorgeous.'

Drawing on the garden at a critical turning point

Whatever her feelings for her back garden it was where she wanted to be after her mother died, suddenly, at the age of 58. Trish highlighted this event as a major turning point in her life; a time when she took stock and re-assessed the course of her own life and a time when gardening reached a peak of importance. There seem to be a number of elements which can be identified in the way Trish describes her need to garden at that time.

First was the need to be on her own, to be away from the strain of meeting other people.

'A complete bolt out of the blue and it shook the whole family. It shook everybody. So I would go out the back... I wouldn't talk to anybody else, people were wanting to see me, and I was like – no, I am not ready yet. Somebody had come around and I hadn't answered the door, and Katherine said – oh she will have been in the garden that is where she is these days. Now, I always was in the garden, but then I was in the garden all the time, and in a world of my own.'

Gardening seems to have provided Trish with a way of taking on the reality and permanence of her mother's death,

'September was always my mum's favourite time of year. It always felt like the New Year for mum, don't know why... But by September there was a lot of stuff coming up, autumn bulbs coming up and stuff coming up. And it just felt to me like it was weird, I don't know, it was coming up even though Mum was not here.'

Although she was seemingly distancing herself from other people, in fact what Trisha highlights is not a feeling of separation but of connectedness,

'And when I lost my mum I had to be out there, literally, with my hands in the earth. I just felt very much more connected then... So maybe that is what it was. Around that, because I was still connected. And I had to have my hands in the earth, touching things, the whole rhythm, everything was there. And I was connected but I didn't have to do anything. I didn't have to give of anything.'

The last sentence seems very important, *'I didn't have to give of anything'* suggests the way that for Trish being in the garden simply helped without any apparent effort or conscious thought on her behalf.

Through being out in the garden Trish seems to have found a certain kind of peace, which she distinguishes from the peace she can get from being alone inside the house,

'...if you sit indoors and listen to music, or read a book or whatever, that is the kind of solitude that is disconnected. I feel you may as well be in a prison. Not that I don't like it. I love sitting indoors and listening to music or reading a book. But I couldn't do that full time. Out there [in the garden] the solitude is peace. In here it is just rest and quiet. Out there it is actual peace. You can hear the birds now, even with the factory making a noise. The birds are still twittering.'

Being in the garden connects Trish directly with her mother, through reinforcing the positive memories she has of her,

'And seeing a particular plant that my I know Mum liked doing well, or listening to the birds and remembering mum used to talk about the birds.'

But for Trish the importance of being connected also seems to relate to being kept safe, as part of a bigger whole,

'And it was keeping me in the world. At that time....Yes. Keeping me alive almost, because I think ... I don't know how to describe this...I think it is to do with my soul still beating from the rhythm of life, even though I wanted to withdraw from it.'

Hopefulness seems to permeate Trish's relationship to her garden at this time,

'...And life is going on. There is something out there. For example, when mum died and I was very sad, there was always something out there that would make me happier, that would give me a bit of peace or make me smile.'

As I said, her mother's death prompted Trish to take stock and she made the decision that gardening should take a more central role in her life,

'It was at that stage that I said – I wish this was my life. I wish gardening was my life and not nursing. And I love nursing and it was really a lot for me to say I want to do something else. And that was when Katherine said – well, it could be. And I said – no that is other people. Then I realised it could be. Then I started studying, and I suppose it has peaked ever since then...The catalyst was Mum. That was what made me turn around and look at life and say – I want more from life than being a good nurse.'

'Mum was the catalyst because I suddenly thought – you know what, she worked really hard all her life. She was a nurse and she had retired and Dad had retired but he was still working a bit. They had, for the first time, gone abroad. They had their honeymoon, because they never had a honeymoon. They had their honeymoon about a year before she died. And I said to my partner – I don't want that to be us. I don't want us to suddenly start doing all the things that excite us a year before one of us dies.'

At the time of the interview Trish was putting this planned career change into action. She had reduced her nursing hours and was studying for a gardening qualification one day a week, with her mind set on early retirement,

'As soon as the mortgage is paid off I am going to retire and just garden...then I will do maintenance gardening just for pocket money, but for pleasure...'

Trish was quite clear on the kind of gardening job she wanted.

'What I would quite like to do, actually, apart from maintenance gardening, is set up a sort of service where people who have just got gardens, I will go around and teach them how to garden.'

I was reminded here of the grandmother who had taught Trish the basics,

'And in fact, when I got my own, first garden, I was twenty four then, when I bought me first flat. And the first person I wanted to come down was Nana, to show me what to do. So she came around. I got her down...

Trish agreed that gardening had remained an ongoing link between her and her grandmother,

'I think it is something we both understand. It doesn't matter how old or young you are, you do it the same way. And she doesn't understand, you know, she certainly doesn't understand my job. I wouldn't even tell her that I work in sexual health. It is something we both understand on the same level. And when she says to me – what have you been doing today? I say – I have been to my

allotment, pulling the beans or whatever, she understands that. So she knows what I have been doing. ...Yeah, and it also gives her some way she can actually express an opinion and not feel like ... she is very frail, she is ninety six, God love her, and she is independent apart from her meals are delivered. She doesn't see very well...So I will ask her – do you think I should be cutting my roses down Nana? Because it gives her the opportunity to be the matriarch she was.'

Trish makes several references to being shown by her grandmother how to take care of the roses and this theme of 'taking care' shines through Trish's story, from the way she notices from an early age how her parents cared for their garden,

'They liked the garden, they loved being in it and they kept the garden nice. It wasn't a dramatic garden....They looked after the roses nicely and they looked after the lawn'

Through her descriptions of her first conservation holiday,

'...and there was a fern called Royal Fern, which actually, now, is everywhere, growing quite happily, but then was about to become extinct, growing in the wild. And our job was to sort this bog out, this peat bog, so it could grow again properly and proliferate, and then really clever people would come along and grow it and plant it elsewhere, but we just needed to save it.'

To her dedication to their allotment,

'Because I can't have an allotment and let it get weedy. I can't just not go for a couple of weeks and let the edges grow up.'

It was difficult not to feel that gardening fulfilled a deep seated need to care in Trish,

'I can't romance it and say every minute of every day I spend on the allotment or in the garden is me in paradise, because it is not. Some things I hate doing, but I have to do them. Actually, [in] the garden, I see myself more as a caretaker of the garden. And it is like when you have a baby. Nobody likes cleaning the dirty nappy, but you have to do it. For your baby. The same with things I don't like doing in the garden. Like pruning...I have to do it for my garden. But it is such an unnatural thing, that. Those plants wouldn't naturally grow. I have put them there so it is my responsibility to keep it appropriate. And I do it for my garden, and that includes the life it sustains. But I do enjoy it. Although it is not paradise all the time.'

After the interview Trish showed me an album of photographs which chartered the progress of her and Katherine's allotment, in the finest detail, from the day they took it over, through clearing, digging, sowing, growing, and right through to the most recent harvests. The album, in both style and content, reminded me, above all, of a 'baby book' chronicling the development of a child from birth, through its various stages of growth. As I looked at it, Trish saw this similarity and laughed and acknowledged that the allotment probably did in many ways represent a child to be nurtured and looked after. She recognised that she was just like a proud parent showing off her offspring.

Gerald: An older gardener

Gerald is a white man, married and in his early seventies, born and brought up in the United Kingdom. He has a small suburban garden but spends much of his time working as a volunteer on a very large garden belonging to a residential home for disabled people. Here, he works alongside and supervises people sentenced by the criminal courts to undertake community service. Our interview takes place in the summer house of the garden which doubles up as a shelter and office space for the project.

Gerald's narrative falls into three main parts, mirroring the three periods which he has identified as being particularly significant for him in terms of his gardening life story. In the first part he talks extensively about his childhood memories of gardening with his grandfather. In the second part he talks about a resurgence of interest after his army career ended, and finally he dwells upon gardening as an occupation in his retirement. Other aspects of his gardening story, for example his parent's garden and his own home garden, are mentioned by Gerald but he does not develop them in any way and they fade so much to the background in his story that I have not included them here. They do not structure his narrative in any way. Likewise although he mentions his wife, a keen gardener herself, and his father, a noted orchid grower, they fade so much to the background that I have not dwelt on their presence in his story.

Gardening with grandfather: laying down secure foundations

Gerald's early years were lived against the backdrop of war - he was four years old in 1939 when the Second World War started and ten at its close. It was not just this war that coloured Gerald's life but also the First World War whose aftermath was still being felt and to which he makes frequent reference. War was not just a distant idea for the young Gerald, it affected people he knew and war time events provide him with markers for the events in his own life,

'I started school about 1940, and I remember that, because it was the beginning of the war and an uncle of mine was seventeen and a half and he was put in the Queen's Regiment and he was captured in the Ardennes - that was before Dunkirk'

Gerald spent every summer until he was about 12 at his grandparent's house. His grandfather, who was seventy when Gerald was born, was the head gardener of a large country estate and was working well past retirement age, because of a shortage of men on the estate, as Gerald says,

'...after the First World war a lot of men didn't come back because they had been killed, and so they were very short of people in the gardens. And I remember there were land girls who worked in the gardens, six or eight land girls, and several men who had survived the First World war.'

Even deep in the countryside the realities of war were not far away,

'...there was a big aerodrome on part of the estate for bombers to fly from because it was very high land...the bombers could take off with a full load. And they had to fell all the woods.'

Captured uncles, woods felled to allow the comings and goings of bombers, talk of men killed and not returning; Gerald doesn't say what sense he made of these things as a young boy but it is perhaps not too much to suppose that they conjured up a world which was at the very least unreliable and unpredictable and linked with loss. He spent a great deal of his time with his grandfather, and he paints a picture of his grandfather as a close companion who, through the gardening and other activities that they shared, carved out for his grandson days characterised by routine and certainty as well as responsibility,

'Grandfather used to give me so much work every morning – I had to weed or do something like that, you see, or sweep up...he would stand with me until he thought I had got it right. He didn't allocate me to someone else in the garden to do it. As the Head gardener, he was an old fashioned Victorian and he would be – "you haven't pulled that out, come on"'

'He would say to me in the afternoons, "Now you write so many letter A's and you join them altogether, and all the B's and it was to get your hand flowing because he used to write with what we described as copper plate writing. And that was how he was writing all the diaries which were kept everyday for what was growing in the garden...on payday when he made the pay up into little pay packets...I would be allowed to go and he would say – count these pennies. And I had to count these out.'

I would suggest that his grandfather provided Gerald with a sense of regularity, control and predictability which went a long way in offsetting the uncertainties of wartime. Gerald himself could see the way a pattern had been set,

‘And that went right the way through my life, accepting responsibilities...I think it gave you a purpose in life. I think the difference with people in those days and today is you were taught to be responsible....’

Above all Gerald learnt at an early age that when he was given responsibility there was an expectation that he would accept it, with consequences if he didn't,

‘...if you wouldn't accept that you were almost discarded right away. “All right you don't want to get on, so don't.”’

And he learnt that there was a proper - an accepted way - of doing things, rules to follow,

‘They used to be across a wide plot of land, three or four men, digging, and then if one man got out of alignment they fined him a penny, and he was probably on six bob a week or something. It was a pretty tough life’

However it was not all effort; his grandfather made the garden a fascinating place for him so he enjoyed the time he spent there,

‘...when you have somebody who really knows their gardening – like Grandfather- he used to point out everything ... “this little plant here is related to that tree there” ...I used to think – how can that tiny shrub be related to a great big willow tree for instance? ...He would describe what you had to look for, you see?’

The vast garden was a place of learning but also a place for play and exploration. Gerald talks about ‘a tremendous amount of discovery’ and describes finding a hidden garden with ‘huge great chunks of rocks, probably four or five tons each’ and an old ice house concealed in a bank. He talks about seeing unusual varieties of butterfly nearby and, beneath his feet, moss ‘like a thick carpet’. He marvels at the continuity of three generations of one family working as woodmen on the estate and talks about discovering a date carved on a fence which showed it had been there for a hundred and six years.

Gerald stayed close to his grandfather and continued to help him, with his garden at the estate and at the house he eventually retired to, right up to his death when Gerald was 24 and already 'a young soldier'. He seems to have had a deep respect for his grandfather, who had created so much of the wonder in the garden, given him close attention throughout their times together, and who had encouraged in him a sense of responsibility, which Gerald equates with 'a purpose in life' ,

...my grandfather, he was orphaned at 7, and he was sent to school by an uncle with three ha'pennies a week, so he got three half-day's schooling a week, and yet he could tell you all the Latin names of shrubs, the families they were related to, he could go through all sorts of things. His writing was beautiful and he took a lot of care about his dress and his home.'

Gerald left school at 16 and became an apprenticed carpenter and joiner, at the direction of his father whose attitude was,

'...Got to get an apprenticeship, got to be a tradesman, and then if anything ever goes wrong in your life you have got your tools to fall back on.'

Through his apprenticeship Gerald met other men who inspired him, taught him, and perhaps reinforced the values encouraged by his grandfather - the respect for skilful work and doing things properly,

'I was very fortunate...one of the men I worked with was what I would describe as a craftsman rather than just a tradesman and he taught me how to French polish and he taught me gilding and he taught me all sorts of other things that people don't know about or don't learn.'

Gardening after the army: building on the secure foundations

Gerald's involvement with gardening waned when he was in the army, first doing his national service but later signed on as a regular soldier. He felt this was to do with having other pressures,

'When I was in the army I wasn't terribly interested because I was trying to scrabble through my life, really.'

When he left the army Gerald identified gardening as taking on new significance in his life. This was partly because by now he had a wife and son and they had moved in to a new house which needed lots of work inside and out, but also because he felt unsettled. He seems to have had an ambivalent relationship to his army career, first serving as an infantryman and later as a parachutist with the Special Air Service; he describes it as a 'brutal career',

'you were taught how to kill...you were taught how to do that very speedily...you knew what you were there for. There were no doubts about what you were there for'

'It is a way of life which is very short term really. You know what you do is because politicians have failed and you go and settle it for them.'

And again the realities of service were personally close,

'...a friend of mine was the first soldier killed in Korea, so we understood pretty early on...'

Yet despite this awareness of brutality Gerald welcomed the ordered life of the army; he knew where he stood, everything was laid out for him, he was prepared to take on responsibility and he was rapidly promoted. He describes the army as being like a family and he specifically highlights the sense of continuity,

'...that is how the British Army holds itself together, because a regiment is like a family and you have got traditions and you are taught the traditions of your regiment and the bravery, or foolhardiness, maybe, that has happened at times....on your regimental colours are the battle honours, where you practically lost the blooming regiment because forty men out of a thousand come back...but nobody forgets in the army. You see the politician and society forget...'

It is not too difficult to see the continuities between Gerald's life with his grandfather – its routines, its emphasis on taking on responsibilities, and its attention to doing the work in the garden properly, working within the rules - with his life in the army with its discipline, routines and continuities. Even more specifically, he recalls one Regimental Sergeant Major, a keen gardener,

'If he got upset by you, he would say – "Will you accept my punishment or would you prefer a charge against you?" – And you would know exactly what you'd get. You'd get a patch of lawn to mow. It was rather nice. He would say, "Cut the lawns, do the edges" or "go and weed that" and then he would come and inspect it. Rather like Grandfather would have done....it was the story of my life, from early childhood to being a young man, and thinking – this is what happens in life, if you get it wrong you will be weeding the garden. All about gardens.'

Leaving the army behind threw Gerald into a period of uncertainty and anxiety,

'everything is done to order, so you have part one orders, part two orders, and you read those everyday and they tell you what you are going to do...part two is what you personally are going to do that day. And when you come out of the army you no longer have this list of do's and don'ts in front of you and you are quite lost. You get up in the morning sometimes and you think - what am I going to do today? What am I supposed to do today?'

Interviewer: Quite a scary feeling.

'It is, it really is'

He found the garden offered him some respite,

'a place where you could rest, almost, a place where you could rest your mind - soldiering is a brutal career'.

The garden seems to have offered this sense of resting place not through its kemptness, calmness or restful planting but because it offered him the opportunity to impose structure and order on it,

'When I got there it was all overgrown, a terrible state, so I thought – I will try and sort this out.'

This work, however, could be done at his own pace, and in his own time, and in this way it offered a sense of predictability and put the control back in his hands which he contrasted with his paid employment in the building industry at that time where he could be, and often was, laid off at a moment's notice. Gardening he says, '... took me out of the reality of life'.

Time is an important element of gardening for Gerald. On several occasions he refers to the way gardening cannot be rushed but imposes its own disciplines on the process.

'If you work at it all the time and improve the soil by digging and weeding and all the cultivation you do, planting, it will take you ten years to get that to work...where you don't think - oh the weeds are coming up again...'

Although he was imposing order and structure on the garden it was in turn imposing these same elements back on him - if he did not follow the rules and the timescale, things simply wouldn't grow as he wanted,

'And you think - if it is growing the wrong way too much I will have to clip a little bit off and get the shape back into it -I find myself miles away from this place and think - oh next week I must get so and so done.'

Gardening and retirement: checking and firming the foundations

The theme of discipline continues to run through the third part of Gerald's story where he has moved on to talking about the gardening he is doing in his retirement where he is working alongside and supervising offenders who are on probation orders. He feels it is the discipline imposed through the activity itself which is most helpful to these, mostly young, people. As he talks about this he begins to appear like his grandfather at the beginning of his story; he is presiding over a garden, not his own, which is large, where his authority is paramount and where he manages a team of men and women. He imposes the same kinds of discipline as his grandfather before him,

'I think it is the discipline of coming here and being told - dig that or weed that. Whatever I want them to do at that time of year...Sometimes you get the attitude that it's boring, but they only think it is boring because they don't know what they are doing, usually, and they are not doing it properly. So you have to start them all over again.'

He talks about the short cuts that have become normal in modern gardening and which he thinks are of only limited value,

'A lot of people just think these days that if you pour expensive compost on top you don't need to really do any digging. But if you look at the really good gardens where they are doing this, it is because somebody in Victorian times had been digging the garden well. My grandfather used to make them dig at least two spades deep.'

This last passage seems to contain hints of a struggle in his later life which is to re-appraise and then hold onto the values which were instilled in him in his youth and which seem, to him, to be under threat. He highlights his latter years at work as being overshadowed by values which clashed with his own; he felt his role was devalued and perhaps most significantly this left him feeling at a loss,

'I retired from being a surveyor for an insurance company. I was glad to get out of that in the end. I didn't mind going to find out faults or problems, that wasn't the problem, it was all the little tick boxes. They would be saying "You haven't ticked this box". But I would be [thinking] - yeah what I have done in the last week paid your salary for a year as well as mine...what I am doing, going out trying to prevent faults occurring, they count that as an irrelevance almost. And I couldn't understand this.'

He refers more than once to quick fixes and short term thinking which he sees as characterising current times,

'As a carpenter - I really enjoyed being a carpenter when I was a young man - , I cut the joints and did things nicely. Today it is all nail it together with bits of metal plate.'

Gardening seems to have offered Gerald a way of working through some of the issues created by these changing times and changing values. For him, gardening cannot be reduced to the quick fix and therefore it embodies a kind of truthfulness; he made several comments that seemed to amount to being 'found out' through gardening. For Gerald this seemed to imply ultimately being reduced to something real and honest, something that could be relied upon. There appeared to be several elements to this. First there was an interpersonal aspect,

'If you don't do it properly they'll know what you do.'

Here, Gerald didn't spell out who 'they' were but I pictured his grandfather or his army commander standing over him making sure he didn't take short cuts.

But then he shifts focus and seems to be referring to nature itself cutting him down to size through its response to his hands on skills, and his knowledge,

'I think if you get your hands dirty in a garden. If you are a hands on gardener and you do something with your hands, you sort of think - well that didn't work. And it puts you in your place in life...It makes you realise what an irrelevance - you assess yourself, or re-assess yourself all the time, and what your value is.'

'It rubs a lot of the corners off you and you realise how little you know sometimes'

Nature could also throw up questions, for Gerald, about which values would stand the test of time,

'It brings you into contact with reality, you are not drifting off into - I hear these lads - they talk rubbish. They haven't got a clue what money is at times...and I think why are we talking about thousands of pounds when a fiver will do it? That is relating to the value of things. I say to them we take this plant and we split it. Now if you go to the nursery you buy each of these little pieces in a pot and it costs you five pounds. Now just dig it out of the garden and we get six or seven...It is not being a skinflint or anything like that - it is saying this little plant has done its season in the ground, now we will perpetuate it by starting again, the renewal of life.'

It was difficult not to see this same sense of renewal in Gerald's life as he described working with a young man in the garden,

'Some people you would not equate them with doing anything in the garden. Have a black lad who was here this morning - West Indian he is culturally - St Lucia. He is quite a character in his way. But he said to me only last week, "I really enjoy doing this." I don't expect he's got a garden. He said, "This is like my granddad would do in St Lucia. I have been there several times and stayed with him, and he does the garden and sits in it all afternoon. Of course I always thought a garden is like that. Now I am doing this, digging this and weeding that, and now I know what my Granddad does to make it like it is"'. '

Gerald felt his life without gardening would be 'very empty' and planned to continue working with the offenders for 'as long as they would have me'. When asked to sum up what his passion for gardening amounted to Gerald said it was about 'keeping everything looking tidy without being too regimented'. He felt the most important thing was to keep 'on top of things'. He then looked about the garden outside the summerhouse we were sitting in and began to

imagine what his Grandfather would have seen – he spotted weeds showing their heads through a mulch that had been laid to suppress them,

‘That would have had to have been hoed immediately...he was a tyrant in one way’

The profile of gardening across Gerald’s life

Gerald’s narrative falls into three main parts, mirroring the three periods which he has identified as being of heightened significance for him in terms of his gardening life story. In the first part he talks extensively about his childhood memories of gardening with his Grandfather. In the second part he talks about a resurgence of interest as he settled into his first home after his army career ended, and finally he dwells upon gardening as an occupation in his retirement. Other aspects of his gardening story, for example his parent’s garden and his own home garden, are mentioned by Gerald in his interview but he does not develop them in any way and they fade so much to the background in his story that I have not included them in the case study; they do not structure his narrative in any way. Likewise although he mentions his wife, a keen gardener herself, and his father, a noted orchid grower, they fade so much to the background that I have not dwelt on their presence in his story.

Gerald’s story reveals that there is a pattern to gardening in his life with well defined peaks and troughs. Three peaks of activity structure the story. The first peak is during childhood when, I would argue, he is laying down the foundations of his future interest in gardening. This is followed by a trough, with almost no gardening activity or interest, when he is absorbed by his army career which crowds out other activities. Then there is another peak of interest when he simultaneously establishes his first home with his wife and his young family, and copes with the transition from army to civilian life. I think it is important to see these two events as distinct although they occurred together. Establishing a first home is arguably an expected life stage which most people will face in the normal course of life, whilst dealing with the transition from a military life style to a civilian one is not an accepted life stage, but rather a life event, which throws up unexpected issues for resolution; to conflate the two risks confusing the particular reasons why gardening might peak at those times.

The final intensification in the importance of gardening in Gerald's story is during his retirement years. Erikson (1980) asserts that the eighth and final developmental stage is one of life review, the task being to reach an understanding about the kind of life that has been lived, what it amounted to and whether it was worthwhile or not. Gerald has reached this life stage and certainly the latter parts of the case study suggest someone in reflective mode.

The theme of control features strongly right through his account from his childhood experiences to his gardening in retirement. For Gerald, as he talks in the present, having control relates to bringing order into the garden – order that reveals itself through tidiness, suppression of weeds, and the feeling that he is on top of things. It comes from having a sense that a job has been done to a standard, that the correct rules have been followed and short cuts have been avoided. In addition, these ideas seem to be at the core of the messages that he feels it is important to pass on to the young people with whom he is working.